

**THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI :  
MYTHS AND MANAGEMENT**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of**

**Doctor of Letters  
of the Universiti Utara Malaysia  
Sintok, Kedah Darul Aman**

**May 2000**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am pleased to acknowledge my sincere and heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to an institution and a number of individuals without whose assistance, guidance and advice, this study could not have been undertaken.

I wish to thank the Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, which offered me an opportunity to pursue my studies and to complete my doctoral thesis.

To YBhg. Dato' Prof. Ir. Dr. Mohammad Noor Haji Salleh, Vice Chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia, I wish to express my gratitude, admiration and appreciation for his encouragement and motivation in completing my work at the University. I wish to thank the Deputy Vice Chancellors, YBhg. Dato' Prof. Dr. Haji Mohd. Salleh Haji Din (Academic Affairs) and YBhg. Dato' Prof. Dr. Elias Salleh (Development), the Registrar, Puan Hajah Latifah Hasan and the Dean of the Graduate School, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Haji Abdul Hamid of the University for their endless advice towards the completion of my academic thesis.

I wish to thank YBhg. Dato' Kol. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Fawzi Haji Mohd. Basri, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs) for his boundless patience in supervising and advising my work. I also thank YBhg. Dato' Prof. Dr. Mohd. Yusof Hasan, the co-supervisor, for his assistance in going through the thesis.

I am greatly indebted to Tuan Haji Mohd. Noor Mohd. Tahir, Tuan Haji Mohamad Salim and Tuan Haji Zainol Abidin Zakaria of the School of Languages and Scientific Thinking, Universiti Utara Malaysia for their help in editing my English.

Last but not least, I wish to thank my wife and children for their prayers and blessings in my academic endeavour.

## ABSTRACT

Malay folklores have been considered as classic works of literature that combine myth with reality. Traditional storytellers of yesteryear used to fascinate their audiences with the subtleties of human behaviour and historical events that were portrayed in their stories. Even today, some aspects of modern methods of management can be inferred from such myths and historical events.

Various incidents in the Legends of Langkawi can be considered as valuable lessons that act as warmings and examples to be learnt. Such incidents indicated the relationship between humans and supernatural elements, animals, natural phenomena and history. Thus, incidents like supernatural events can teach us the differences between good and evil as in stories about Gedembai, the ferocious ghost and stories about the Seven Wells. Lessons from animal stories can be deduced from stories about Geruda and the White Crocodile.

From stories about caves one can learn about good and bad elements. They portray three types of human characters, namely the good ones and the bad ones, with the third one who would always be present whenever there was a quarrel in order to pacify the warring parties. On the other hand, stories of historical nature tell us about good-natured humans who became victims of those who were envious of others. Such wrong doings often led to further bloodshed and instability within the community.

Although stories in the Legends of Langkawi deal with supernatural happenings and about strange caves, animals as well as people in history that were of mythical nature, they also contain some indirect references to effective and favourable ways of management.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE : THE SUPERNATURAL LEGENDS : - “Gedembai” and “Telaga Tujuh”	5
CHAPTER TWO : THE ANIMAL LEGENDS: - “Garuda” and “Buaya Putih”	50
CHAPTER THREE : THE CAVE LEGENDS: - “Gua Langsuir, Gua Bukit Putih and Gua Cerita”	97
CHAPTER FOUR : THE HUMAN LEGENDS: - “Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak”	135
CHAPTER FIVE : THE HISTORICAL LEGENDS : - “Makam Ajaib” and “Mahsuri”	164
CONCLUSION	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY	221
BIOGRAPHY	222



## INTRODUCTION

Attractions in many forms have made Langkawi a tourist destination. The island had in the past many legends and mythologies which can be grouped into different kinds. Some are of supernatural nature which had elements of imagination and mysticism beyond reality. There abound also legends related to weird animals as well as to nature and natural formation of caves, hills and mountains. These phenomena are the historical background of Langkawi.

Of the legends linked to natural phenomena are the stories of Gedembai and Telaga Tujuh (Seven Wells). Both these phenomena are strange happenings. Gedembai possessed supernatural powers that could change the form of things. Seven Wells is the account of fairies who bathed at the wells. In addition to these supernatural phenomena, there are stories about legendary animals of which the well-known are Garuda (large bird) and Buaya Putih (white crocodile). Besides these, there are legends which tell strange happenings that took place in the caves found in Langkawi, such as Gua Langsuir (Caves of the Sirens), Gua Bukit Putih (White Hill Cave) and Gua Cerita (Cave of Stories). Each of the caves is said to hold its own legend.

Other than the legends connected with strange happenings, animals and caves, there are stories related to human beings who were closely linked to the formation of hills and mountains. The legends Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak are believed closely related to the formation of hills and mountains such as Gunung Raya (Raya Mountain), Gunung Cincang (Cincang Mountain) and Gunung Sawak (Sawak Mountain).

It is worth mentioning that two of the legends which hold a place in history are Makam Ajaib and Mahsuri – the former tells the greatness of Tun Jana Khatib while the latter gives an account of the famous legend Mahsuri.

From the foregoing paragraphs two different values possessed by the characters in the legends deserve consideration. They are positive and negative values. The good values should be adopted in daily life whereas the negative attributes should be shunned, as good values beget praiseworthy, admirable and lovable qualities of human beings whereas negative values breed bad influence, poor attitude and contempt.

The living values – the praiseworthy ones should be adopted for use in everyday life as attitudes and traits bear close relations with management.

There are two different perspectives, namely mythical stories with traditional elements of literature, oral history and language which are closely knit with modern management, thinking and ethics. It attempts to match old traditional values as mentioned in the legends with values in modern management.

In classical writings of each nation mentions are made of management values which are relevant to modern living. For example to the works entitled the Art of War written by Sun Tze, 2500 years ago contained not only the art or technique of warfare but the work has become a literature with information on education, politics, economies, management and others. Sun Tze's teaching can be incorporated into many subjects. Likewise, the

legends of Langkawi – myths and management abound with exemplary management values.

Malay classical literature contains many different genres, such as oral literature which describes strange phenomena, animals, natural formations and origin of man. Other than these, there are accounts such as entertainment, writings on religion like Hinduism, history, the coming of Islam and about prophets.

The collection of stories in the research on legends of Langkawi is derived from oral recounts or traditional Malay stories such as Gedembai, White Crocodile, mysterious caves, fairies and the formation of hills and mountains. Recorded works touch on the greatness of Malay historical figure in the story of “Makam Ajaib” and Mahsuri, a beautiful woman who became victim of jealousy and deceit.

In literature a legend has the connotation old popular story that may be true about people, places or events that exist while myths connote well-known stories which were made up in the past to explain natural events or to justify religious beliefs of social customs. Both these connotations bear close relationship with literature and history. Legends and myths in literature as well as in history portray good images and thoughts of a race or a nation. Literature and history reflect development of a society. Similarly, the legends in this research clearly reflect “weltanschauung” or world view of the Malays who accepted the influence of animism, Hinduism and Islam throughout the Malay World.

Negative and positive values are two characteristics of world-view of anything, especially attitudes and traits in human beings. Positive values found in the legends are love, kindness, sincerity, hard work, sacrifice and others, whereas negative values are envy, jealousy, falsehood, deceit, accusation, greed and others.

In the context of modern living, these praiseworthy values can be incorporated into the science of management and human resource management. The negative values should be discarded as they may weaken or destroy any modern organization. For this reason, oral or written accounts of these legends have become inheritance to society in modern living. The good ones should be practised to give courage, hope, confidence, persuasion, guide, enthusiasm in any venture. Important aspects in modern management are : managing, planning, organizing, leading, controlling, ethics, social responsibility, human resource management, motivation, communication and organizational conflict, politics and change.

This study of the legends of Langkawi encompasses the myths of the past and management of the present and the future.

CHAPTER ONE :  
THE SUPERNATURAL LEGENDS

# Gedembai

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Once upon a time there lived in Langkawi a weird creature called Gedembai. According to the story, Gedembai's mouth was said to be so deadly that she could turn any human or animal into anything that she wished by just uttering the words. For instance, if she were to say to someone, "You look like a cat!" Lo and behold! The poor person would immediately be transformed into a cat. If she wanted to turn a person into a piece of rock, she could just do this by saying, "You look like a piece of rock," and that unfortunate person would instantly be turned into a lifeless piece of rock. She might even turn a cow into a woman or, for that matter, she could turn a man into a woman.

The words of Gedembai were the deadly instrument of destruction. If a person was turned into a piece of stone, it certainly spelt death. If that person was turned into a tree, the per-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

son would grow like a tree and bear fruits, if it was a fruit tree. The tree would die after its normal lifespan, of course. However, if some humans cut it down for firewood or a strong storm uprooted it, it would then die earlier.

Sometimes we wonder how Langkawi has a legend that is comparable to the Greek epic of Perseus and the Golden Fleece. Of course there is a difference. In the story of the Golden Fleece, Medusa could turn anyone who looked into her eyes into stone. In the story of Gedembai, she could turn anything into any other form by cursing the object.

In the story of the Golden Fleece, Perseus was asked to bring back the Golden Fleece which was under the protection of a Gorgon, Medusa, a hideous monster with snakes as hair. Perseus, using a big polished shield to prevent him from looking into her eyes, approached the monster with a sword in his hand. As Medusa approached him in order to turn him into stone, he showed her the polished shield. She looked into the shield and saw the reflection of her own eyes. As a result she herself was turned into stone. Perseus without looking into her eyes cut off her head and took it away with him. He later managed to defeat all his enemies by turning them into stones. He showed them the face of Medusa and her eyes which were never closed.

The Gedembai of Langkawi was feared and hated by everyone. She was said to live on the main island of Langkawi. She was virtually the queen of Langkawi. In fact, she became so powerful that her every wish would be fulfilled by those she commanded with no questions asked. No one dared to cross

## GEDEMBAI

her. Anyone who disobeyed her or threatened her would be turned into some other forms. But unfortunately, unlike the story of the Golden Fleece, there was no handsome hero who would come to fight her and cut off her head.

Gedembai was described to appear in many forms. Kamus Dewan, a Malay dictionary, describes Gedembai as a ghost. Encyclopedia Malaysiana describes her as a creature like a human being but with the size of a giant. Both books describe her as having the power to curse anything to turn into stone. There are several books written on the subject, mostly as old folk tales for children to read. Some of the books said she could even fly like a bird. These books did not give detailed descriptions of her appearance. But all books agreed that she was a female.

Some people expected Langkawi Gedembai to be like a witch with a crooked nose, long hair, thin and tall with gawky features. They also expected her to look like Medusa, with hideous features and serpents wriggling on her head as hair. Langkawi's Gedembai was, on the contrary, said to be a full-bloomed beautiful female in her early thirties with enticing features of a luscious woman. Woe betide any man who tried to flirt with her or who tried to woo her if she happened to dislike him. But there were many men whom she liked and with whom she lived as husband and wife until she got tired of them.

Any man who had lived with her could consider himself lucky if she just drove him away after she got tired of him. Those who were unlucky would end up in a lifeless form. Any man with whom she lived with must try to please her and had

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

to make her happy all the time. Even if he did not enjoy the liaison, he must force himself to show to her he liked it or else he would be transformed into something else. A man who in the beginning considered himself to be lucky in winning such a beautiful woman, would later live to regret it all his life.

Thus; any man she lived with could enjoy a brief period of bliss until she decided to discard him. Gedembai was said to be incapable of loving anyone seriously, except for the purpose of fulfilling her lust. Her character was such that she was devoid of any love for any person or, for that matter, anything whatsoever. Only a man who was ignorant that she was as deadly as a poison would try to win her heart. Those who knew her would keep themselves away from her.

So the people in Langkawi during her time, lived in great fear. Many left Langkawi to stay somewhere else. Langkawi soon became almost deserted with a mere handful of people left who could not afford to leave. Some chose not to go away because, they argued, wherever they went, Gedembai could also be there. Their reasoning was right because Gedembai occasionally crossed the narrow Straits of Malacca to the mainland. She was said to have gone to Penang. These were the only places that the Langkawi people could flee to. She would not hesitate to curse any Langkawi man or woman whom she met at these places for running away from her.

Some people said she lived in Gua Cerita, a famous cave which lies on the northern tip of the main island. It was so called because of many stories which grew around this cave. According to the story, Gedembai once lived in a beautiful timber house



## GEDEMBAI

built for her by the villagers in another part of the island. One day as she was taking a stroll along the beach of Tanjung Rhu, she came across Gua Cerita and took a liking for it. At that time there was a family living there comprising a man who was a fisherman, his wife and three children.

Gedembai, wishing to take over the cave, cursed them all to become stones. That was why there were stones in the shape of beds, plates, candle-holders, pots, pans, and such other household goods in the cave. There were also pieces of stones in the shape of a man and a woman, which were said to be those of the couple. These stones are no longer there. They had since been vandalised or removed by irresponsible people.

Gedembai ate, drank and slept like any other human being. Some fishermen and some farmers who chose not to run away, would provide her with rice, vegetables and fish. They took turns to cook food for her. The food had to be delicious, otherwise they would get into trouble. Gedembai in turn looked after them and protected them from their enemies. Soon no pirates would dare to attack the island. No maharaja would even dare think of conquering the island. But at the same time, no trading junks called. So there was no business done on the island and the people became poorer and poorer.

Still, the villagers had to keep Gedembai happy. They learnt this through a number of costly mistakes of others before them. Gedembai would not harm those who were docile and weak. The villagers would not even dare to look at her as she spoke.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

In the island of Langkawi as well as in the mainland, one can find a number of stones in the shape of buffaloes, crocodiles or other animals. These were once said to be actual living creatures, but were turned into their existing shapes by the Gedembai. In the mainland north of Kedah, in the small village of Melele near Kodiang there is a piece of stone that resembled a buffalo. The stone buffalo was said to be originally a young man who had become her lover until he tried, foolishly, to woo another girl. To escape from her curse, the young man fled to the mainland. But as evidenced by the stone, he was unable to escape her wrath.

In Batu Maung, Penang Island, near the sea, there is one big footstep mark on a piece of stone. There is another similar print at Kampung Perlis, Bayan Lepas, not very far from the other print. These prints are said to be the footprints of Gedembai. There is no story as to why she went there and no one could tell what havoc she caused there.

Even Gunung Jerai, the Kedah peak, was once believed to be a ship, called Putera Jerai. It was turned into an island by Gedembai. Later, due to erosion in the neighbouring parts of the sea coast, soil was heaped around this island and gradually the island was joined to the mainland and subsequently became a part of the mainland. That is the reason why one can still collect seashells and fish bones from the land around Gunung Jerai.

Gedembai's reputation became notorious and widely known. Humans and animals ran away from her on hearing her

## GEDEMBAI

approach. But there were unfortunate ones who did not run away because either, they did not notice her or did not know that she was the infamous Gedembai. Some men, including even old ones, who did not know her, would wait expectantly for her to come near them. Her striking beauty attracted men towards her like moths to the light.

One day she walked into a village on the mainland somewhere in Yan. All the people there ran away, except a pregnant woman about to give birth. The village midwife did not know of Gedembai's approach as she was engrossed with the work of delivering the baby. On seeing them Gedembai asked what they were doing. They did not reply because they were busy with their work. Moreover, not knowing that she was Gedembai, they thought that the person should have known better in not asking such silly question as she could see for herself what they were doing.

Gedembai however, was angry because she thought they were rude to her. So she cursed the pregnant woman, the midwife and an egg that was used as an offering to be turned into islands. You can see these three islands off the coast of Kedah opposite Yan. They are appropriately known as Pulau Bidan, that is the Midwife Island. The other, Pulau Bunting, meaning Pregnant Island and Pulau Telur, meaning Egg Island.

It was said that Gedembai lived before the time of King Solomon who was the greatest king on earth. Not only humans, but animals, birds and insects also had to pay homage to him. It was also said that King Solomon understood the languages of

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

animals and birds and would dispense justice to all his subjects without fear or favour. There was no one else then who could equal King Solomon's power and wisdom. So when Solomon came to rule the earth, Gedembai found herself to have lost all her powers. She tried to curse King Solomon into a stone, but the curse did not have any effect on him. Gedembai, fearing punishment by the King, fled from the world, much to the relief and joy of humans who came to know and fear her. It was not known where she went or whether she had died. She just disappeared.

There is another version of the story of the creature in Pahang. Here, she was known as Sang Kelembai, instead of Gedembai. The Pahang's Sang Kelembai was also said to be a "she". Some storybooks described her appearance as a giantess, having the form of a human but about three times the size. She was, however, said to be ugly with thick eyebrows, flat nose, big elephant ears and fanged teeth. Sang Kelembai was said to have lived along the Pahang river. She liked to eat the soft top leaves of bamboo plants, although she ate anything else such as fruits and meat as usually eaten by humans.

The word *Sang* is an honorific and endearing term used by the Malays to refer to animals or objects in stories about them. For instance, they sometimes referred to the moon as *Sang Bulan* meaning the moon. *Sang Harimau* or *Sang Belang* meaning the tiger. There was a famous Malay children story of *Sang Kancil*. It was about a clever mouse-deer that played tricks on *Sang Harimau* and outwitted the bigger animal all the time. *Sang* was usually used by storytellers to narrate stories during the

## GEDEMBAI

time when animals were said able to speak to one another. For this reason, the Langkawi's Gedembai at times was also referred to as *Sang Gedembai* by storytellers.

Sang Kelembai of Pahang too had the supernatural power of transforming any animal or person into stone. But there was a variation of her capability as compared to Langkawi Gedembai. She could only turn humans, animals and other living objects into stone and not into any other form. There was yet another variation in that she could do so just by accosting the object without even wishing the poor object be turned into stone.

Sang Kelembai merely had to say something to the victim. That was all. The victim would, as soon as Sang Kelembai had finished her sentence, be turned into stone. For instance, if she were to ask a person, "Where are you going to?", lo and behold, that person would be transformed into stone with the shape of a human. If the object was an animal then the stone would retain the original shape of the animal. Thus, she could not even say to a girl, "You are beautiful!" Apparently she was more deadly than Langkawi Gedembai.

According to the story, Sang Kelembai at first did not realise that she possessed the power to turn humans and animals into stone until one day she met a mother elephant and her young one. The Kelembai asked the mother elephant where she was going to. And lo! Both the elephants were turned into stones. Sang Kelembai was amazed and only then she realised that she possessed the power.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

The story went to say that one day she went into a village where a feast was being held. She asked one of the men who was cooking curry what he was doing. The unfortunate man was turned instantly into a stone. She then apologised to other persons present there. All those unfortunate people to whom she apologised were also turned into stones.

Sang Kelembai, might not have the slightest intention of turning those objects that she accosted into stone. For this reason she could not ask for a cup of water from any human even if she was thirsty. In other words, she could not make friends with anyone. She began to worry and was unhappy with her power, although at first she enjoyed having it. The power had become a liability to her instead of an advantage. She began to despise herself.

When people came to know about the deadly result of being accosted by her, they all ran away when they saw her approaching. Sang Kelembai was worried. Before she had the power, she could call many villagers her friends. She used to play with their children who used to make fun of her. She did not mind. As long as they were happy, she was happy too. The villagers used to give her bananas and jackfruits. Now they were not to be seen anywhere. She was alarmed at the thought of meeting her boyfriend. She would transform him into stone if she were to speak to him. She could not pretend to be dumb. She could no longer get married. If he were to propose, she could not even say "Yes."!

One day, Sang Kelembai happened to pass by an old man who was cooking a big pot of broth for a feast for another wed-

#### GEDEMBAI

ding. Sang Kelembai refused to speak to the old man who had greeted her. She did not want the old man to be turned into stone. The old man, due to his bad eyesight, did not recognise that she was the infamous Sang Kelembai. The old man then invited her to join in the feast by saying, "Sila, sila," meaning, "Welcome, welcome."

Sang Kelembai did not reply, but hurried forward in order to be away from the old man. Unfortunately in her haste she tripped and fell to the ground. As a result she was startled. In those days (even these days), there were some ladies who had the tendency, on being startled, to uncontrollably and unconsciously follow the acts or repeat the words of the person who caused them to startle. The Malays called it, *latah*. For instance, if a person startled another person to *latah* by shouting words, "Rat! Rat!" The startled person, if she was a *latah* would also repeat the word "rat". If the other person were to dance, the *latah* would also dance.

Sang Kelembai belonged to this species of ladies. She was a *latah*. As she fell on her face, she was startled. She repeated the last words spoken by the old man inviting her to the feast, "Sila, sila." Upon her saying these words, the old man in a flash was turned into a piece of stone.

Sang Kelembai was sad when the innocent old man who did her no harm was turned into stone. He had in fact invited her to the feast. In her remorse she picked up the big cooking pot with the boiling broth in it, and threw it into the Pahang river. At the same time she cried out the word, "Celaka!" mean-

## GEDEMBAI

ing more or less "be damned". The pot became an island in the big Pahang river, now called Batu Karai. The broth got stuck to the bank of the river where there was a village. This village was subsequently known as Kampung Bur, short for Kampung Bubur. *Bubur* is the Malay word for broth.

Sang Kelembai was so dejected that she wandered around aimlessly. She could not explain why she was cursed with such an evil power. She moaned her fate and wondered as to why she should be punished so cruelly in this manner. She could not bear to think of her many human friends whom she had unintentionally turned into lifeless pieces of stones. She remembered before she was endowed with the power, the people of the certain villages used to give her not only fruits but also rice and curry which she enjoyed very much. She was very upset. She had to think as to how to discard her power. She thought of going to a medicine giant. But there was the problem as to how to tell him of her trouble. Because as soon as she told him, he would be turned into stone. She heaved a big sigh and tears appeared in her big brown eyes.

She suddenly felt very hungry. In her deep thought and worry, she had forgotten to take any food. She could not ask the villagers for fruits as they would be turned into stone. She had no alternative but to steal some bananas from the farm that she knew situated in the outskirts of a village adjoining a jungle. She had never been to this village before. In order to avoid meeting any of the villagers, she entered the fruit orchards through a jungle path. She shuddered to think that she had to steal, a thing that she never did before.



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

The people of this village learned of her coming. They also knew about the disastrous consequences of her curse. They were scared. The elders of the village hurriedly held a meeting and drew up a plan how to drive her away from their village. They got hold of a big toothless old woman and put her in a cradle along the path of Sang Kelembai. They also caught some tortoises and released them around the cradle. They cut bamboo into short stumps and placed them around the cradle. They also cut the top of all bamboos around the place and dumped the soft leaves elsewhere.

Now, he-giants and she-giants, as told in the old stories, were never endowed with any degree of intelligence. They were said to rely more on their strength and big size rather than on their brain. That was why, in all those stories, giants had never won in fights against much smaller humans. Our Sang Kelembai was no exception.

When Sang Kelembai reached the place where the toothless old lady was lying in the cradle, she was astounded. She thought that the old lady was a human baby. This was because only babies were placed in cradles by the humans. She thought the people in this village must be very big to have such a big baby. Then she saw the tortoises and thought that even fleas in the place were enormous in size. Then she saw the bamboo stumps and thought that the baby must be eating the bamboos as if they were sugar cane. She also saw the tops of the bamboos being cut around the area. She thought that the humans in that village must be very tall to be able to reach and cut the bamboo tops. She came to the conclusion that the humans there

#### GEDEMBAI

must also be very big and strong and that she would be no match against them.

Sang Kelembai then felt a deep fear, particularly when she thought what would happen to her if she turned one or two of them into stones. She was afraid they might punish her. They would come down hard on her and that she would be torn to pieces without mercy. She became so frightened that she withdrew from the village and ran to live in the jungle far away from humans. This was the reason why Sang Kelembai was never seen again.

There was yet another version of the story of Gedembai. In this story she was called Gedembai, the same name as the Langkawi Gedembai. Like the Langkawi Gedembai, she could transform any person or animal into stone by uttering the words, "You become a stone." But she could do so only to living objects and not to lifeless things. She could turn them only into stones and not into any other forms. She was also described as a giantess with a human form. She was supposed to live in a village called Kampung Hulu Sungai, somewhere in Pahang.

She created the same havoc as the other two Gedembai. She cursed many people to become stones including a bridal pair who were seated on a *pelamin*, a dais where the bride and bridegroom were seated side by side in a ceremony for the relatives and friends to see. They were turned into stone because, according to Gedembai, they offended her for not replying when she asked them what they were doing up there.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Apparently, this Gedembai did not know much about a *bersanding* ceremony. The couple in a *bersanding* ceremony would never talk back because it was customary for spectators to tease them and to ask them silly questions. Furthermore, they did not know it was the Gedembai who asked them the question. Gedembai cursed the couple and all the people at the ceremony into stone.

So Gedembai went about the village and turned many people into stones. She was particularly angry if people, upon seeing her, started to run away from her. She enjoyed stopping them short by cursing them into stones. Apparently, this Gedembai possessed a different temperament from Sang Kelembai and Langkawi Gedembai. This Gedembai was a sadist and she appeared to have a streak of madness in her twisted brain. She enjoyed turning humans into stones. She would laugh joyfully on seeing a poor human wriggling helplessly on the ground like a worm on the top of a hot tin plate while being transformed into stone.

Sang Kelembai, on the other hand, felt sorry and was full of remorse whenever she had caused a human to become a piece of stone. She despised her own power and wished she never had it. Langkawi's Gedembai, however, turned people into other forms only when she disliked them or those who were rude to her.

The villagers of Kampung Hulu Sungai were very unhappy with the situation. The headman of the village, named Tuk Sali, called a meeting to find a way to avoid the calamity. They realised if things were to continue as they were, eventually no

#### GEDEMBAI

one would be left in the village. After hours of discussion, they still could not find a solution. The reason was the Gedembai's curse was so deadly that no one could confront her.

The only way they could think of was for someone to go to Gedembai and ask her to be merciful and not to inflict any more harm on innocent people. If possible to ask her to move to another place. But who was to bell the cat? The act was dangerous as the emissary might be turned into stone. Since no one volunteered to go, Tuk Sali, being the headman, decided that he should go. He thought that, being an old man, he did not mind if he were to die. On hearing that Tuk Sali was going, nine other villagers decided to accompany him. They just could not allow him to go alone.

So all of them went. Armed with parangs and big knives, they advanced cautiously to meet Gedembai. They dared not make any noise because they knew it would arouse Gedembai's anger. They found her or rather, she found them. She was behind some big trees and being tall, she saw them coming. She let out a big laugh. Only then did Tuk Sali and his men saw her. They were all frightened as they realised that they were looking at death itself.

"Where are you all going to?" asked Gedembai.

Tuk Sali replied in a most polite way and in a very flattering manner. "Oh! Good-hearted Sang Gedembai, we come to ask for your kind help."

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

"What kind of help?" Gedembai asked.

"We beg you not to curse the villagers any more. They are innocent people. Please have pity on us," Tuk Sali said.

"Oh! Anything else you wish to ask?"

"Oh, honourable Sang Gedembai, if you have any intention of going away and live somewhere else, we shall be too happy to provide you with all the food that you may need," said Tuk Sali in what he considered to be a most polite way.

But Gedembai became angry instead. "So you want to drive me away, eh?" she accused Tuk Sali. She thought the villagers were bad and greedy. They would not allow her even to stay in the village. Thereupon she cursed them all to become stones. So poor Tuk Sali and his nine followers were all turned into stones.

The news of Tuk Sali and his followers turning into stones reached the village. The whole village wept because Tuk Sali was a good leader, loved by everyone in the village. They gathered in the house of Tuk Sali and decided to leave the village in order to save their lives. They thought since they could not fight Gedembai, the only thing to do was to move and stay in another place, far away from her. The other thing that they could do was to pray to God that they be relieved of the scourge that fell on them. So before leaving, they prayed and prayed.

Not long after that, there appeared a young man with a boyish looking face in front of the house of Tuk Sali. He was

## GEDEMBAI

smartly dressed. He wore a yellow shining *baju* which was a type of a Malay shirt, and small leg trousers up to the knees as normally worn by Malay warriors. There was a beautiful hand-woven silk sarong worn around his waist on the top of his trousers and shirt. He also wore a beautiful red headgear, tied in a style used by warriors. A kris with an ivory handle was seen tucked into the fold of his sarong on the left of his waist. He looked calm.

He asked a few men standing there why the villagers looked so sad and why all of them were packing their goods as if they were moving to stay somewhere else. They told him the reason. The young man said he could help them. They asked him who he was. He said his name was Putera Indera Sakti, son of the King of Panca Persada and that he was travelling far away from his country in order to see other parts of the world.

He then asked them to show where this creature, Gedembai was. They were at first very sceptical that the young man could fight Gedembai alone. He looked so raw and was armed with only a small kris. He might be turned into stone. They thought it would be a pity for such a young man to die before he could experience life to the fullest. So they did not want to tell him. But he insisted. He told them to just show him where Gedembai was and that they did not have to accompany him to the place. They reluctantly led him to the place where Gedembai was. As soon as they saw Gedembai they quickly withdrew and hid themselves among the bushes in order to witness the fight. They would run away as soon as they saw the prince turning into stone.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

The prince, after being left alone, walked confidently and slowly towards Gedembai and stood in front of her in defiance. His right hand was holding the handle of his kris and the left hand on his hip, as he looked up fiercely into the face of Gedembai.

Gedembai, on seeing him, was amused. No human had dared to stand in front of him in such a manner before. She thought this young man was stupid not knowing who she was. She thought of humouring him before turning him into stone. She asked him from where he came from and what he wanted. The prince did not reply. Gedembai asked him again and again. Still the prince did not reply. Gedembai became very angry and cursed him to turn into stone.

But lo, the prince did not turn into stone but stood there as if nothing had happened. Gedembai cursed him again and again using different words. Still the prince stood there calmly. Nothing happened to him. Then it was Gedembai's turn to be afraid. Her curse did not affect the young man. He must be someone with extraordinary power to withstand her curse. She tried to run away.

The prince then drew his kris, placed it on his forehead, recited some magic words and pointed the blade towards the fleeing Gedembai. She was stopped on her tracks and became smaller and smaller in size. Eventually she was turned into a small frog. Those villagers who were hiding among the trees came out shouting with joy as they watched Gedembai wriggling with pain whilst being transformed into a frog. When the

#### GEDEMBAI

transformation was completed, the villagers trampled the frog. Gedembai died a more painful death than she had inflicted on her victims.

The villagers dug a hole in the ground and buried the frog there. Fearing that she would resurface, they made the hole very deep and then they firmly filled it with earth. The prince then asked them to show him those persons who had been cursed by the Gedembai to become stones. They showed him. The prince took out his kris and pointed the blade towards the stones. The headman, Tuk Sali and nine others, the wedding couple and all others were returned to their original forms. The wedding feast continued as if nothing had happened.

The people were jubilant. They brought out their drums, big and small and beat them. They danced to the rhythm of the drums. They shouted and jumped with joy. They could now look forward to a happy and peaceful future. In the midst of their excitement and joy, they forgot about the kind prince who had helped them. When they realised this, they thought they should thank him for his help. They wanted to prepare a feast for him. They looked for him. To their surprise they could not find him anywhere. They searched for him everywhere in the village. Still they could not find him. It was as if he had vanished into thin air.

The villagers were unhappy. They did not want to be said that they were an ungrateful lot. They did not give any reward to the prince. In fact, they did not even thank him for such an invaluable service that he had rendered to them. Then they sud-



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

denly realised that the young man might have been sent to their village by God to help them kill Gedembai. Their prayer must have been answered.

The evil work of Gedembai lived on. Her curses remained the talk of the people until this very day. She became so infamous that among the Malays there were quite a number of sayings about her. To this day, in certain parts of Malaysia, if one were to pass a rude remark or to make any uncalled for comment on another, he may be said to be having a mouth of Gedembai! For instance, if a woman were to say of a friend of hers, "She eats like a pig," one may say to her, she possesses the mouth of Gedembai. These are harsh words and if they were uttered, the person uttering them must be spoiling for a fight. Even the words "foul mouth" would not be the correct translation of the meaning. Most probably the words, "venomous mouth" would be more fitting.

Some mothers before who wanted their children to come inside the house after dark would put fear in them by saying, "Come inside! Gedembai may be around!"

So if you come across any stone in the shape of an animal or human nowadays, then you cannot be far wrong if you guess that it was caused by the curse of Gedembai a long long time ago.

# Telaga Tujuh

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(THE SEVEN WELLS)

**O**n the slopes of the Gunung Cincang in the main island, there are seven wells. They are actually not wells, but pools. Yet they are called wells. In Malay, the word "telaga" means wells. They are not deep and big enough to be called wells. They are situated along the slopes on the top of one another. The water flows from the topmost well down the slope into the next well and from there to the next well below it until it goes into the seventh well. The top-most well is fed by a stream of water running between the cracks of the rock surface originating from the top of the mountain. From the seventh well the water flows into a small stream which then flows into the sea.

According to the story, the seventh well could not be seen by the human eye as it was exclusively used by fairies who descended from *kayangan* or fairyland, to bathe. Only a few lucky people were able to see the seventh well and see the fair-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

ies bathing and playing there. It was said that if anyone could see the well and the fairies, it would bring to such person good luck. But one should not tell anyone else what one saw, otherwise the good luck would not work.

It was said that the fairies used *sintuk* (cinnamon) to wash themselves with at the well. After they had finished bathing, they would leave behind the used *sintuk* and lime. Anyone who found these used up *sintuk* and lime should be considered lucky, for if the stuff were taken home, it could be used as medicine for all kinds of diseases. Women in the old days normally used *sintuk* as a shampoo to wash their hair and to scrub their scalp and body with. Before using it, the *sintuk* should be dipped in a bowl of coconut milk.

It was believed that *sintuk* was an effective cure for dandruff and for destroying hair fleas. *Sintuk* is the bark of a tree of the same name. The bark was pounded until only the moist fibre was left. The name of the place where the University Utara Malaysia is presently situated is 'Sintok', the name of this tree. It is reputed that there were a lot of *sintuk* trees there before. But with the advent of the modern shampoo, *sintuk* ceased to be used. Even in those days, *sintuk* was more difficult to obtain. Nowadays *sintuk* is no longer used.

It was believed that there was a jinx about the seventh well. No one should go and look for it. If one were to do so, he or she would be liable to meet with an accident. Many people who tried to look for it slipped down from the slopes, sometimes injuring themselves and sometimes getting themselves

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

killed. So the advice of the elders in Langkawi to those who visit the wells is just go and see what can be seen and not to search for anything else that cannot be seen. There were, however those chosen few who could see the seventh well and the seven fairies bathing there. Sometimes they could also see the *sintuk* and lime that were left behind by the fairies.

There are a number of Malay stories revolving around fairies from the fairyland descending to the world to bathe at a lake or well. The stories of "Si Suton" and "Malim Deman" are a few of those stories. In both stories, the hero, both were handsome princes, spied the seven fairies bathing in a lake on earth and fell in love with one of them, usually with the youngest one. The hero then stole the flying gear or the wings of the fairy. As a result the fairy could not fly back to the fairyland. The prince took the fairy to his palace. At the palace, the prince hid the flying wings underneath the paddy stock in a barn. She eventually fell in love with the handsome prince and they got married.

After several years of marriage, the fairy eventually found her wings hidden in the paddy barn. She put on the wings and flew back to her parents in the fairyland. The prince who loved her very dearly, was heartbroken. He followed her to the fairyland. He had to fight several of her new suitors in order to regain his wife and took her back to earth. This was the pattern of these stories and how they were spun.

The story of Pulau Dayang Bunting or the Island of the Pregnant Maid, was another story where a fairy came down

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

from fairyland to earth to live by a lake. This fairy had a good reason to be disappointed with life and subsequently had little faith in male species. She resolved that she would never marry. This was a case of a serious broken love affair. She had caught her fiance making love to another fairy. As a result she broke the engagement between them. She came down to the earth in order to avoid meeting with any male genie and thereby preventing any similar incident. But love knew of no resolution. On earth, she subsequently met a male genie who was an out-cast from the fairyland and fell in love with him. The resolution not to marry that was firmly made was thereby dashed.

But in the case of the Seven Wells of Langkawi, there was no dashing handsome prince coming to carry away any of the fairies who came down to bathe there. No one could even see them when they were bathing, except those who were lucky. There were no princes living in Langkawi. There were only innocent fishermen and farmers and none would dream of enticing a fairy to be his wife. Nothing was told about the wings of the fairies as they came down to bathe. It was not told whether they took them off before bathing. It was not even told that they were beautiful. In this respect the story of the fairies of the seventh well differed from other stories. In those stories the fairies were beautiful and they took off their wings before bathing.

There was one magical gift granted to anyone who could bathe at the seventh well for a certain number of times continuously. The person who could do so would regain his or her youth and would make the person look young again, although that

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

person might be a grandmother or a grandfather. The number of times required for a person to bathe at the well in order to gain those qualities was unknown. They could only say, a person must bathe there many, many times to get the result. But they warned that anyone who acquired such beauty and youthfulness would not always live to enjoy what was gained. There was in fact a story of a woman who bathed at the seventh well for so many times that she gained the look of a twenty-year old again. As most of Malay folk stories, unlike many Western fairy tales, this story ended up pathetically. Those hearing it would always ask why it could not end up with a happy note.

Once upon a time there was a young widow named Mayang. She lived in a village at the foot of Gunung Cincang. On the slope of the hill, were the famous Seven Wells. Her fisherman husband died at sea in a freak storm many years ago. Mayang was left with a son, Si Tukun, to look after. She refused her parents' request to go and live with them. The reason being that the house left by her husband was more beautiful and well built than that of her own parents. Furthermore there was a plot of paddy field and a vegetable plot around her house where she could conveniently eke out a decent living for herself and her infant son.

She worked hard on the land and managed to find enough food for herself and her son without having to beg. There was rice in the paddy plot, fish in the paddy field and vegetables in the garden. She was able to sell some of her rice and vegetables. With the money, she bought clothes and the necessary provisions for the kitchen. She was happy with the small but com-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

fortable house which she could call her own. Being still a beautiful young widow, there were many men, young and old, who sought her hand in marriage. But Mayang refused to remarry. The thought of her late husband was still fresh in her mind and that she could not relish the idea of having anyone else to come between herself and her son. She loved Si Tukun with all her heart and looked after him with tender care as any loving mother would.

Mayang used to go up the slopes of Gunung Cincang to the Seven Wells to bathe. She bathed at any of the wells that she fancied. She at times used *sintuk* and lime to wash her body and her hair. Sometimes she noticed certain strange creatures bathing with her at the well. She did not mind them and they did not mind her either. Sometimes she was given their *sintuk* to wash her body with and whenever she had a lot of the stuff, she in turn, would give them some. Later she began to bathe with them at one particular well which she did not see before. It was in fact the seventh well. Although she could more conveniently bathe at the well near her house, yet she felt that bathing at the wells on the hill slope was so refreshing and enjoyable. She could not resist from going there to bathe.

As a result of constantly bathing at the seventh well, Mayang never had any problem with her health. In fact she was never known to have come down with any serious illness. She noticed that whenever she felt feverish or having a headache, she would be fully recovered after bathing at the well. So whenever Si Tukun had fever or indigestion or cried too much, she would take him to bathe at the well and soon after that the

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

problems would disappear. Mayang did not give much thought to this phenomenon but later realised that it must be the supernatural power of the seventh well that contributed to the recovery. So she continued to bathe there as often as possible. She did not divulge this secret to anyone for fear the well would be angry with her and might withdraw the benefits of bathing there from her.

She later learnt that the creatures who bathed with her at the well were fairies who came from the fairyland. Unknown to her, she had in fact been bathing at the seventh well. She was one of the lucky few who could see the well and the fairies. But by this time she got so used to being with fairies that she was not afraid of them. When they flew back, they left some used *sintuk* and lime at the well. She took them and used them on herself whenever she bathed at home. She did not know whether Si Tukun could see the fairies or not when he bathed with her there. But since he did not make any indication that he saw them, she assumed that he did not see them. So she did not tell him of their presence as this might frighten him. This went on for a number of years.

Meanwhile, Si Tukun grew up to be a strapping young man. Si Tukun was as handsome as an opera hero. He bore a strong resemblance of his father. The Malays have a number of sayings when a child looks like the father. For example, "Bagaimana acuan begitulah kuihnya," meaning the cake must be similar to its mould. "Ke mana tumpah kuah, kalau tidak ke nasi," meaning where else would gravy be poured except on rice?



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Being a filial son, Si Tukun was grateful to his mother who gave him life and who had suffered in order to bring him up. He would do nothing that might incur the displeasure of his mother. He did all the heavy work around the house, such as chopping firewood, ploughing the land, planting paddy, and fetching water from the well. Mayang was left to do only light work such as cooking, tidying the house and washing clothes. But Mayang continued to do the heavy work of pounding paddy which was to separate the husks from the rice, as this had always been traditionally a woman's job.

As a man born and bred on an island, Si Tukun yearned to go to the sea. Like his father, the sea was in his blood. Even when he was small he used to sit on the seashore, looking longingly at the sea. The sound of the waves as they crashed against the shores was music to his ears. The ripples of the water on the surface of the sea during her calm moments were, to him, murmurs of welcome. He always watched fishermen going to the sea in the morning and coming back in the evening with their catches. They were a cheerful and healthy bunch as they strode along on the sandy beach, chatting and laughing. He made up his mind that he too would be a fisherman when he grew up. He reasoned out, there were fish in the sea in abundance. They did not have to be bred and fed. They were just waiting to be caught and it was foolish not to catch them. A farmer had to till the land and sow the seeds, and then wait for a number of months before the crops could be harvested. Pests and bad weather might destroy the crops. But a fisherman did not have to face all these problems. He just went to the sea and reaped the harvest.

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

Si Tukun admitted that there were of course risks from storms and waves in the sea. But even cutting wood in the jungle, there were also risks. The cut timber might fall on the cutter. He knew of a number of farmers who were gored to death by their pet buffaloes. A farmer might get bitten by a poisonous snake. Furthermore, Si Tukun thought, a man must accept risks, otherwise he would get nowhere. His resolution to be a fisherman enhanced every year as he grew up. When he finally grew to be an adult, he asked permission from his mother. She at first objected. She still remembered her husband who perished in a freak storm while at sea. She preferred her son to work as a farmer which was an easier job than having to face the wraths of the sea. But when Si Tukun pointed out to her that even her going up and down the slopes of the mountain to the wells were full of risks, she relented. She knew if she were to forbid her son from going to the sea, he would not be happy for the rest of his life. She did not want him to be unhappy.

So Si Tukun became a fisherman. He began by working in a boat belonging to a rich man on the island. He learnt fast and worked hard. Soon he could match his catch with any experienced fisherman on the island. He saved enough money and bought a boat of his own. He stopped working with the rich man and started going to the sea with two friends in his own boat. He caught a lot of fish. He sold his fish to the farmers and shopkeepers on the island. He was honest and never told his customers that his fish was fresh when they were stale. He became a successful fisherman. Soon he and his mother lived a more comfortable life. He enlarged the house his father left and bought his mother many fine clothes to wear.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Mayang was happy. She knew that her son had become a man. She was glad that her sacrifice to bring him up in the proper way, had produced results. As she watched him, she soon realised that she as his sole parent had a duty to find him a wife to look after him. She knew, a wife could make a man more happy than any other women could. She knew the life of a man or a woman would not be complete without a mate. Even animals needed a mate. Besides, she herself yearned for grandchildren running around the house and with whom she could play with. She thought she now earned a right to enjoy life a little. She knew that, to be able to play with grandchildren was one of the highest source of enjoyment. To hear them laugh and cry as they grew up, was simply a sheer joy beyond compare.

She subsequently asked Si Tukun whether he would like to marry. He replied that he left the matter entirely with her. He said he would marry if she decided that he should and would marry any girl that she chose for him. She had in fact already surveyed all the girls in the villages near her home. Unfortunately, to her, there was none suitable to marry her son. She did not want all the happiness and joy that they had be broken up by a wrong choice of a marriage partner.

Mayang was of the opinion that, a good wife should be one who would place the happiness of her husband foremost in her mind. She knew of some girls who were so engrossed with their own self-interest that they neglected the interest of their own husbands. These women, on their marriage, expected their husbands to provide them with all the good things in life. While

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

their husbands toiled day and night, they lived a life of ease at home. It never crossed their minds that they too had to contribute to the success of the marriage and to make whatever sacrifices that were necessary for their own happiness. But of course, Mayang knew, there were also some men who made slaves out of their wives. They made their wives a source where they could vent their abuse and anger. They treated their wives as inferior beings, suitable only for them to satisfy their lust.

Since there was no girl in Langkawi suitable for her son, Mayang asked her son to go out of Langkawi and to get himself a wife. Si Tukun at first refused to go. He did not want to leave his mother alone. But Mayang insisted, telling him that she could take care of herself, as she always did when he was still a child. Further, she reminded him, a wife was his future happiness or misery. She told him, a correct choice must be made for a suitable girl and he should be extremely careful in making the choice. She further told him, she was getting old and she could not be forever around to look after him. Si Tukun with a heavy heart eventually agreed to go. He agreed with what his mother had said and thought it was a good advice. He knew a bad wife was not only a source of misery to himself but also to his own mother. He did not want his mother to be unhappy in the future because of his wife.

After all preparations had been made, Si Tukun was ready to leave for the adventure. He loaded enough rice and salted fish in his boat as provisions during his travel. All the while, Mayang managed to put up a brave face, but all the time holding back her tears. She did not want her son to see her sad. She had never parted with him since his birth. In her mind, the fu-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

ture happiness of her son was all that mattered. She had therefore to sacrifice her own feelings and looked forward for a happy future ahead.

Si Tukun asked his mother what had been in his mind for a long time, how to choose the correct girl. She then gave him a ring, telling him that he should marry a girl whose left ring finger could fit the ring. Only that girl, she said, would be suitable for him. She further told him that the ring was given to her by his father before their marriage to try on. When it fitted her finger, only then his father decided to marry her. Si Tukun accepted the ring and put it in the fold of his sarong which he wore around his waist. He thought that his task was not difficult after all. It was just to find a girl who could wear the ring. Many girls could wear it. He then said goodbye to his mother and left in his small fishing boat to a destination he himself did not know. He vowed that he would not shave until he met the girl he would marry.

Mayang watched her son row out from the edge of the water into the sea. He and his boat became smaller and smaller until they were lost in the horizon. She returned home, a sad mother. She now allowed herself to weep her heart out. She now realised that she had to till the paddy field and work on the vegetable plot again. She did not mind this as it was a choice she herself had made. The future happiness of her son was all that mattered. Undoubtedly, she thought she would herself share the joy out of her son's happiness. The girl who could wear the ring, and who would marry his son, would make them all happy.

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

Si Tukun crossed the Straits of Melaka to the mainland. He went to many places and met many beautiful girls. Some of them were too happy to marry him. He was handsome and strong. But unfortunately the ring could not fit the left ring finger of any of them. After being unsuccessful in one place, he set out to another place. Still he could not find such a girl. The ring was either too small or too big for the finger of all the girls who tried it on. Si Tukun was frustrated. He had spent so many years wandering without there being a ray of hope of getting a wife.

He wondered why his mother wanted him to marry only a girl who could wear the ring. He could not think of any reason. But he knew that there must be a reason, otherwise his mother would not have asked him to do so. He should therefore follow her instructions. He knew he could not go against his mother's words because he had never done that before and he would not start doing it now. He now realised, what he considered to be a simple task before had turned to be a formidable one. He thought, if in the end he still failed to find the girl, he would go back home to his mother and let her decide what to do.

In the meantime, Mayang at home was grief stricken with the absence of her son. She was lonely with no one to speak to in the house. She remembered his coming home from the sea with the boat paddle in his hand when he was around before. She visualised how he greeted her as he reached the stairs of the house and asked her what food she had prepared for him. The face of her son always loomed into her memory. Four years went by, still Si Tukun did not return. She had almost given up hope of seeing her son again.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Mayang remembered that her own husband perished in the sea. His body was never recovered. But she obtained confirmation that he had really died. A few of those who survived brought home the news of the tragedy. But in the case of Si Tukun, it was different. There was no news about him at all. He went out alone. In the sea there were pirates and on land there were robbers. Furthermore, travelling in a small boat to cross the sea was a hazardous task beyond any imagination. But Mayang hoped that her son did not perish in the sea, as his father did, or did not die on land to be buried in an unknown grave. She hoped that one day he would walk to the house grinning and greeting her and asking her what food she had cooked for him.

Mayang repented for not only allowing him to go, but in fact had urged him to go. He did not want to go in the beginning. She should have made arrangements for him to marry any girl on the island. After all, it was fate which would decide whether a couple in a marriage would be happy or unhappy. It was too late to do anything now. She became frustrated and disillusioned. She recollected that she never had a really happy life. Her marriage floundered early with the death of her husband. Now her son who had been a source of happiness to her also disappeared without a trace.

In her loneliness Mayang went to bathe at the seventh well almost every day. She could find some solace in bathing there. The fairies sensed her sorrow and asked her for the reason. She told them. They consoled her not to worry and told her that her son was safe and would be back sooner or later. She was somewhat pacified with what they said but was not convinced. She had bathed at the seventh well so many times that she unknow-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

ingly had completed the number of times required to transform her to be beautiful and young again. She was indeed so transformed and looked like a girl of early twenties with a complexion of a schoolgirl. But in her sorrow for her son, she never bothered about her looks. In fact she did not seem to be conscious of her beauty at all.

Si Tukun, unable to find any girl in the Peninsular who could wear the ring, rowed across the Straits of Melaka to the east coast of Sumatra. He travelled into many towns and villages there. Still he could not find any girl who could wear his ring. But he plodded on. In the course of his long travels, Si Tukun had acquired many new experiences. He went through big storms and waves and survived them all. He learnt the art of self-defence from a guru in order to protect himself. He mastered the art and became the guru's best student. The guru's daughter, Aminah, fell madly in love with him. But unfortunately she could not wear his ring. So he had to leave her much to his regret, for he had come to love her very much. To him, his mother's instructions were an indispensable prerequisite for him to choose a bride. So he plodded on.

On land he met many robbers and in the sea he met many pirates. If they were just a few, he vanquished them by himself. If they were too many, he helped the locals to organise themselves to put the bad people down. He helped many people in distress. He also left many brokenhearted girls behind him.

During all these years he changed a lot. He became more matured in thinking and appearance. Gone was the youthful appearance that he had at the time when he set out from



#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

Langkawi four years ago. Black beard and moustache adorned his formerly boyish face and which made him more handsome and manly. After spending many years roaming in the sea, exposed to the sunlight, his skin had changed to dark tan. His long training in the art of self-defence made him muscular and sturdy. Indeed he looked very much a changed man. Considering his good deeds, he was every inch a hero.

Si Tukun travelled from one village to another and from one island to another. Still he could not find a girl who could wear the ring. He became very frustrated. He wondered why it was so difficult for him to find a wife. He knew a number of his

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

girl that he could not understand. He spoke to her and later confessed his love to her.

The girl, who was none other than Mayang, did not recognise her own son. He had changed so much, beard and all, that it did not strike her mind that he was her son, Si Tukun. She was then on the cliff overlooking the sea hoping to see her son returning home as she used to do. Upon seeing such a handsome young man in front of her, she also fell in love with him. She too felt a strong pull, which she could not understand, in her feelings towards this man. Perhaps her prolonged sorrow over the loss of her son, she simply could not expect that he would return, and that this young man was her lost son.

Si Tukun too failed to recognise his own mother. The magic charm of the seventh well had turned her to be so beautiful and young that it did not occur to him this girl was his own mother. When he set out from Langkawi four years ago, he had a different memory of how his mother looked like. She was then already an aging middle-aged woman due to hard work during her younger days. Furthermore he did not realise the place was Langkawi. So he could not have expected his mother to be there and in the form of this enticing and beautiful young girl.

So they were both happy to meet one another. They uttered endearing words. They hugged one another. Mayang who had been chaste since the death of her husband could not control herself. Si Tukun too, his long travels in the sea, induced him to yearn for love. So one thing followed another. What followed then was a long passionate love between them. After everything was over, they remained silently in each other's arms

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

for a long time. They were both happy. They both felt as if they had unburdened all their sorrow and frustrations.

They then spoke about marriage. Si Tukun told her the condition that was laid down by his mother, which was, the girl that he should marry was the one who could wear his ring. Si Tukun brought out the ring and slipped it into the girl's left ring finger. Lo and behold, it fitted her figure perfectly. Si Tukun's joy knew no bounds. He now had found a wife he had been seeking. He agreed to marry her. He thought all his travels and worries were all over. Since his relatives were far away in Langkawi, as he thought, he himself would go to her house and ask her parents for her hand in marriage. After the marriage, they would go back to Langkawi. They then could live happily together. He then told her he would go down and prepare the boat for them to leave for her house.

When Mayang heard what the young man said, she realised that she had made love to her own son. It was her own ring that he slipped into her left ring finger. It was a devastating shock to her. She was so ashamed that she was at a loss as what to do, as if the sky had fallen on her. She wept. She did not have the courage to tell him that she was his own mother. She thought it would better if her son did not know at all. What had happened was too much for her to bear. She now realised the jinx of getting the beauty from the seventh well, that no one could live long enough to enjoy it. She thought the best thing to do in this situation was to hide everything that had been done. She had to vanish completely. So she stood up on the cliff and flung herself into the roaring sea below with the ring still on her finger.

#### TELAGA TUJUH (THE SEVEN WELLS)

But alas, she was not there. She vanished like the wind. He wondered how she could do so. The area was full of rocks and there was nowhere for her to hide. He had searched for her everywhere. He just could not believe that she would kill herself. She was happy when they were together and had agreed to marry him. So why should a happy girl kill herself? he asked.

Si Tukun did not marry. He did not have the ring anymore to try it on another girl. The ring had in fact found a finger that could wear it. This girl was therefore his bride. She had agreed to be his wife and had in fact virtually become his wife. Therefore he made a vow not to marry until he found the girl. Her face, smile, voice, and the sweet moments they were together as they made love on the hard cliff, continued to be fresh in his mind. She was to him, as beautiful as a fairy from the fairyland. He could not expect to find another like her.

Si Tukun died at an untimely age of broken heart yearning for the girl he loved and for his mother. It was a great pity that such a good man died in this way. The jinx of the seventh well had affected not only his mother but also himself. It was rather cruel and unjust for he had done nothing wrong against the seventh well. For him the only consolation was, he was spared the pain of knowing that the girl with whom he made love on the cliff was his own mother. But he could not be blamed for this because he did not know.

Mayang herself was not to be blamed for what had happened. She had been, in fact, a good wife, widow and mother. She had sacrificed herself for her husband who told her, before

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

his death, to take good care of their son. So she did and did not remarry, even though there were many worthy suitors. She sacrificed herself for her son. The punishment on her was therefore grossly unjust. Further, she did not seek the beauty that was thrust on to her. She bathed at the seventh well as it was conveniently near her house and she was able to see it. She had no intention to be turned into a ravishing beauty. This was a cruel world, but fate always had its ways. Humans had no alternative but to submit themselves to fate.

The Seven Wells draw a lot of visitors. Throughout the years the area continues to look beautiful and serene. The pleasant atmosphere and the slight lower temperature from that on the land below, exudes peace and tranquility. The sprays of water and with the correct positioning of the sun in the sky, conjures up the seven coloured rainbows. The sound of the clear running water as it darts from one well to another is music to the ear. But all these scenic beauty and tranquility however, belie the cruel punishment for anyone who goes up there with the intention of looking for the seventh well and the fairies. Worse still, if anyone is transformed to be as beautiful as a fairy through the seventh well's magical power, the punishment would be indeed very severe.

## **The Supernatural Legends**

The first chapter deals with the legends of Gedembai and Telaga Tujuh. Both mythologies relate supernatural beings who lived amongst the people of Langkawi. Gedembai was an infamous as well as a fearful and hateful being. Originally Gedembai was a maiden of Langkawi who possessed extraordinary power which she used to curse humans or animals she took offence on.

Langkawi Gedembai was believed to be a beautiful woman who was fond of enticing men and cursing them into stones when they become a bore to her.

From this story an example can be drawn of how a being abuses power – in this case Gedembai who had supernatural power and used it indiscriminately to satisfy her lust to the extent that her tyranny was felt not only in Langkawi but also in the mainland such as Pulau Pinang and Kedah.

People in Langkawi greatly feared Gedembai. Despite their daily offering of food to her, she was utterly contemptuous and ungrateful to them and harmed them. Ingratitude can be a factor in the fall of an organization in modern management.

Many stories abound with Gedembai and her origin. One such story is Gedembai's animosity with King Solomon and her existence in Pahang. The animosity illustrates that elements of cruelty, abuse and ingratitude are human traits practised then and now. Gedembai is a symbol of bad, ungrateful, cruel, heartless and power-crazy tyrant. There

were many other 'gedembai' who were short-tempered, easily angered and arrogant characters who were tricked by simple people.

Gedembai is pictured as someone who holds power but is insensible, a sadist and cruel toward people who humbly plead for mercy. And yet this being could be defeated and cursed into a frog by a smaller person who was a prince. The defeat and death of Gedembai was celebrated by the people of Langkawi and the great deed of the prince was well remembered.

The bad influence of Gedembai is effective and wide in society, so much so anyone who speaks ill of things or who does not take kindly to things is said to have 'poisonous mouth' of Gedembai. Children were scared off at the mention of the name "gedembai" because of the evils this supernatural being could cast on people. In present day context anyone who is 'bad-mouth' is termed as 'laser-mouth'.

The story of Telaga Tujuh (Seven Wells) is closely related with fairies from fairyland. It is a folklore. In reality the Seven Wells is situated at the foot of Gunung Mat Cincang in the vicinity of Burau Bay. The wells are a supernatural formation which is a tourist attraction.

The seventh well, the last of the formation is believed to hold strange tales. It was the bathing place of the fairies. It was said that anyone who happened to see the fairies bathing would be blessed with good luck. The two stories – Gedembai and the Seven

Wells are poles apart. The former conjures many things negative while the latter is evocative of pleasant imagination.

The story about fairies is full of interesting plots. They descended to bathe at the wells and the fairest among them caught the eyes of a prince who stole a kiss. This meeting developed into love and ended in marriage.

In management there are organizations where humanitarian elements abound, but on the other hand there are organizations teemed with damaging elements.

In the tales of Seven Wells there's mention of fairies but not the prince who stole a kiss from the fairest of them. This story mentioned a widow named Mayang whose husband was lost at sea. She had a son called Tukun. Mayang led a good life through hard work after the loss of her husband. She brought up Tukun and pampered him. Years later, at the bidding the boy was sent out to look for a life partner. During the time the boy was away Mayang used to bathe at the seventh well every day, so much so she turned into a pretty maiden. After five years of adventure Tukun returned to Langkawi, met a beautiful girl who captivated him and they had an affair. It was obvious that because of their failure at recognising each other – the mother had turned young and the son was not aware he was back in Langkawi that their romance developed and unknowingly they committed incest.



This story illustrates how enticing beauty can be. It serves as an example that man's good fortune can turn tragic. Consequent to the incest Mayang committed suicide and Tukun lived a regretful life.

Despite the tragedy that befell Seven Wells in olden days, the place still attracts visitors. The flora and fauna and the natural pleasant surroundings of the place are so resplendent as if to hide its tragic past. The story behind it may be only an imagination but the beauty of Seven Wells hingers to this day.

## CHAPTER TWO : THE ANIMAL LEGENDS

# Garuda

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(THE GIANT BIRD)

**G**aruda is a popular Malay name of the very big bird, the roc. The Arabs spelt it as *rukḥ*. It was a legendary bird well known among the Arabs, Indians, Malays, and Indonesians. The word *garuda* is Sanskrit and the same name is used by the North Indians, Malays and Indonesians. The stories of the roc are to be found in the mythologies of these people. The Tamils in the south call it Garudan. In certain parts of India it is associated with the Hindu religion.

The stories about the big bird might differ from one country to another. The description of the bird, however, is almost the same. It was a very big bird, possessing tremendous strength. It was said that it could carry two full-grown elephants in each talon. It had a beak and wings and it flew just like an ordinary bird. In some books relating the story of Sinbad the Sailor, there were pictures of Sinbad tied to one of the legs of

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

the roc as it flew in the sky. The pictures portrayed the bird to look like an eagle but it was many, many times bigger.

In the Indian mythology, the picture of the bird showed some human features although it was still called a bird. The Hindu roc had a human face, eyes and ears. But instead of a nose there was a big beak. There were two wings on the back with the feathers going down almost reaching the legs. There were no feathers on the chest which looked more like a human chest and there were two human hands. On the head and legs there was a thick growth of luxuriant curly black hair. All pictures of this bird in the Hindu religion showed that it wore earrings and bracelets at both the lower and upper parts of the arms. In fact the Hindu roc could be more appropriately described as a man with a bird beak and wings. In fact, without the beak, the Hindu roc could easily be a dashing, suave and handsome hero in any Indian film.

The people in the countries where there are stories of the roc revered the bird. It is a sign of strength and power. The Indonesian logo painted on their national airlines is a picture of Garuda which looks like a bald eagle. They even call their airline, Garuda. Most probably they wanted to convey the message that their airlines can fly as powerful and as safe as the Garuda.

The Thais too revered the bird. It was the royal emblem which, at one time, the King alone could make use of it. But later, some Thai leaders argued that, since the government was the King's government, the government should also be allowed

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

to use it. So now the emblem is being used for all purposes connected with the Royal Thai government. The Thai roc appeared to have originated from the Hindu belief, being half bird and half human. The mascot on the royal barge is a picture of the head of a roc carved from hardwood.

In the Hindu version, it was said that the roc served as a vehicle bird for one of the gods, Vishnu, who went about on the back of the bird. It was also said that the roc was given another task by the gods, that was to hunt down and kill evil people and serpents. The roc was said to be a friend of Rama. When Rawana wanted to seize Sita and take her away, Garuda at that moment also known as Jentayu, implored Rawana not to do so. But Rawana refused to listen and as a result, a fight started between them. Jentayu was defeated by Rawana who then seized hold of Sita and flew away with her in his flying carriage. Jentayu later helped Rama to find Sita. Thus it appeared that in Indian stories, the roc was a good bird and a friend of humans.

In Malay mythology, the roc was associated with evil and destruction. In all Malay stories, the roc was a villain who was instructed by someone more superior and powerful to destroy countries and to sink ships. In the story of Merong Maha Wangsa, the roc wanted to destroy the ships belonging to King Rum on a flimsy excuse that these two countries might become too powerful if the marriage between a prince of Rum and a Chinese princess was not stopped. Thus in one of the Malay proverbs, if it is said, "Macam negeri dilanggar garuda," it means that the place is razed to the ground and everything is destroyed and has become worthless.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

In China, the story of the roc was mentioned in Marco Polo's travels. When Marco Polo arrived there he mentioned about it when describing Madagascar and other islands off the East African coast. According to Marco Polo, Emperor Kublai Khan inquired whether the bird could be found in those parts of the world. Marco Polo presented the Emperor what was claimed to be a feather of the roc, which might have been a frond of the raphia palm. The Chinese believed the roc lived in the other side of the world and that was Madagascar. In fact the people of Madagascar in fact had, for generations been telling the story of the roc which they handed down from mouth to mouth. They loved the bird and some in the old days regarded it as a god.

In Egypt there was a sacred bird called phoenix which was not a roc. But some people thought this bird was the roc. It was believed to be an eagle and of the same size as an eagle. Phoenix was associated with the worship of the sun by the Egyptians. When the Romans conquered Egypt, they saw pictures of the phoenix and were fascinated by them. When they returned to Rome, they had the picture of the bird engraved on one side of their coins. It was at the time when Rome was a big empire.

Some Malay writers translated roc or Garuda into English as phoenix. This was incorrect because the perception of Garuda in the Malay stories was a huge bird, whereas a phoenix was of the same size as an ordinary bird. The reason for this was, most probably, phoenix is more popular and well known in the West. That was why even upon the discovery of America, the Americans named the capital of the state Arizona, Phoenix. So are a

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

host of other places named after phoenix, such as Phoenix Islands, Phoenix Park, Phoenixville, and many others.

The Greeks had a similar mythology on the phoenix. Probably they borrowed the myth from the Egyptians as their descriptions of a phoenix as having brilliant gold and reddish purple feathers were similar with those as described by the Egyptians. In both mythologies there were the same stories that the phoenix would live for 500 years. After that it would burn itself out and from the ashes a new phoenix appeared. The new phoenix then carried the ashes of the dead phoenix to the altar of the sun god, Heliopolis. Since phoenix is more extensively known, it had become more popular than the roc. For this reason, some Malay writers translated the word Garuda into phoenix.

In Hong Kong, a film was made called The Pearl Phoenix. The story was a romance, said to have occurred in China. It was about a young beautiful daughter of a minister. The girl had lost her pearl brooch shaped in the shape of a phoenix while playing in the garden. A young handsome scholar later found it and returned it to the girl. The scholar fell in love with the girl. But it was not easy to wed the daughter of a minister unless he could prove his worth to the minister and also to the girl. So he sought employment in the household of the minister which he obtained and started to show his scholarly prowess. The girl eventually fell in love with him. But alas, for her indiscretion, she was given a sword by her own mother to kill herself for falling in love with such a lowly man, a servant. Intrigues, manoeuvres and heartbreaks then began. The story depicted the

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Chinese belief that wearing any ornament with a figure of the phoenix on it would bring good luck to the wearer. The girl continued to wear the phoenix brooch and she eventually married the scholar and lived to a ripe old age.

In China, the luck and the belief associated with a phoenix was considerable. The Empress of China had a phoenix as her emblem, but the emperor had a dragon. If a province was full of corrupt officials and people there were mean and greedy, the Chinese would describe the place as not a proper place for a phoenix to perch. We could see this episode in the film of *The Romance of the Three Kingdom*. In another part of the film, the royal seal of the emperor was found in a big stone on which a phoenix had perched. When they broke open the stone, they found the seal there. The Egyptian version that a phoenix lived for 500 years and after that it burnt itself and a new phoenix would take its place is also popular in China.

In the Malay story, Si Siton, we are told that there were two rocs, a mother and a son. In this story, the mother roc unknowingly carried Si Siton, the hero of the story to the land of the fairies. Si Siton had earlier turned himself into a flea and hid himself in the feathers of the mother roc as the bird flew to the fairyland in search of food. Si Siton wanted to go up to the fourth layer of the land of the fairies in order to claim back his wife from a male fairy. This male fairy had earlier came down to the earth and stole the hero's beautiful wife and took her back to the land of the fairies.

In the book, *Syair Agung* there is a story about the roc trying to seize a princess, Puteri Permai Gemala and taking her

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

away in its claws. A fight ensued between the roc and Sultan Mahabat Mahkota. The hero shot the roc with an arrow. The bird then disappeared and in its place, a human named Raja Syah Kobat appeared. Actually, according to the story, the roc was Raja Syah Kobat who turned himself into the bird. He was then at war with Sultan Mahabat Mahkota. The cause for the fight was Sultan Mahabat Mahkota had earlier eloped with the bride of the brother of Raja Shah Kobat named Puteri Permai Gemala. The brother was killed by the Sultan. Raja Syah Kobat turned himself into a roc in order to seize the bride from the Sultan. The fight continued in their original form. Raja Syah Kobat was eventually killed by the more powerful Sultan.

In the story of *Hikayat Malim Dewa*, the hero, Malim Dewa fought a roc having seven heads. Malim Dewa severed all the seven heads of the roc with a clean sweep with a sword that possessed magical powers. In this story we were told that there were three rocs: father, mother and son. Only the father roc was killed in this story. There was however, no mention about the fate of the mother and son roc.

The famous *Arabian Nights* or more commonly known as *The Thousand and One Nights* is another book that tells us at great length the story about the roc. In the story of Sinbad the Sailor, we were told that while Sinbad was sailing on his second voyage in his ship with his crew, they came to an island. They went ashore where they found many fruit trees, plenty of flowers and a lot of birds singing. The air was fresh. Strangely, however, there were no humans living there. Sinbad and some passengers from the ship wandered on the island. They ate fruits and drank the fresh stream water. Feeling tired Sinbad fell asleep



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

in the cool breeze underneath a big tree. When he woke up, he found that the ship had sailed and left him behind on the island. The crew must have thought that he had been lost as they could not find him.

Sinbad later discovered that he was left stranded on an island inhabited by rocs. He found a roc egg, as big as a big dome. As he was inspecting it, marvelling at the work of God, the mother roc suddenly descended from the sky and sat on the egg in order to hatch it. Sinbad was covered under her wings. Sinbad thought this was an opportunity to get out from the isolated island. So using his turban, he tied himself to a leg of the roc which was as big as the stump of a date palm. He had to be careful not to allow one of the claws to scratch him. After sitting on the egg overnight, the following morning the roc flew with Sinbad tied to one of her legs. She landed on another island. Sinbad untied himself as the roc was catching a big serpent for her food. Sinbad slid himself out and escaped from the roc.

On this island Sinbad saw a lot of precious stones, such as diamonds, gems and onyx strewn about on the ground. He scooped some of them and put them in his pockets and turban. But there were also a lot of serpents there, some were as big as the trunk of a tree. He discovered that he was in a deep ravine where no human could go down or go up. He knew he was in great danger and if he was not careful enough, he could end up in the belly of one of the serpents.

Later, Sinbad found that some cunning people had discovered a way to get the precious stones. He saw some chunks

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

of meat being thrown down from the edge of the cliffs at the top. What these people did was they slaughtered sheep, cows or goats and cut the meat into pieces and threw them into the valley. The stones would get stuck to the pieces of meat if it landed on them. A big eagle would then swoop down to take the meat. It dared not eat the meat in the valley for fear of the serpents. It would fly up with the meat together with the stones and tried to eat the meat on the top of the cliff. The person who threw down the meat kept a close watch nearby. As soon as the eagle alighted on the rock, the person would approach the bird armed with a big stick and would scare the eagle away. He would then collect any precious stones stuck on the meat.

Sinbad escaped from the valley by tying himself to a big piece of meat that was thrown down. Subsequently the meat was flown up to the top of the cliff by a very big eagle. The owner of the meat was disappointed when he saw underneath the lump of meat was a man instead of precious stones. Sinbad was saved from the dangerous valley. With the precious stones he had collected, he became a rich man.

In another part of the story of Sinbad, it told us how a crew from Sinbad's ship went ashore on an island and they found a roc's egg. Without realising the danger, they broke open the egg with big stones and slaughtered the roc chick inside. They thought the enormous flesh of the roc chick could provide them with meat as part of their provisions in the ship for many days. They brought it to the ship. But unfortunately the parent rocs came to know about the killing of their chick. They were angry and in retaliation they sank the ship by dropping a

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

big stone on it. Everyone in the ship was drowned, except of course, Sinbad. Had he died, the narrator of the story, a newly wed queen would be executed because she would have no more stories to tell the sultan.

Not many books described the food of the roc. But in the *Arabian Nights*, the rocs were said to eat elephants and serpents. As narrated in the story, Si Siton, the roc ate elephants, buffaloes, horses, and other such big animals. On the day that Si Siton arrived at the place of the rocs, the mother was away. When she came back, she brought a horse to feed her son.

The roc in the story of Si Siton appeared to have a keen sense of smell. When she came back with the horse in her claws, she could smell a human, Si Siton, who had earlier turned himself into a flea and hid himself in the feathers of the son roc. The son roc had promised to help our hero to get a free ride to *kayangan* on his mother's back. The son roc lied to his mother that not even fleas and flies could get there, not to speak of human beings. The mother believed him.

From these stories, we learn that the roc's menu did not appear to include humans. In the story of Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa, Garuda captured humans and brought them to work in his palace as his slaves. They were not harmed unless they were lazy or tried to escape. They were either pecked or kicked. But he would not eat them if they died as a result. When he brought the Chinese princess and her maids to the palace, they were very well taken care of. Some storytellers said, for fear of King Solomon, the roc would not dare to eat humans as Solomon himself was a human.

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

Most of the stories did not reveal how the roc originated, except in the Indian story. According to the Hindu story, a roc originated from a human couple. The husband, was a renowned sage. The wife gave birth to two big eggs. As the eggs took too long to hatch, the mother, tired of waiting, broke open one of them. One child with strange features appeared. The lower half of the child was a lump of flesh. He ascended the sky to become the charioteer of the Surya, the sun god.

From the other egg came out the Garuda. Even from the time of birth, the bird was endowed with so many extraordinary mystical powers. As described before, he was half man and half bird. He could make himself a thousand times smaller than his normal size and could also make himself a thousand times bigger. He possessed enormous strength and could fight and subdue a whole nation by himself alone.

The Malays said that the fight between Rama and Hanuman against Rawana took place in Langkawi. After Rawana had been vanquished, the island was deserted and no one lived there. Later an evil roc, said to be a descendant of Rawana came to stay there. Rawana was such a notorious person that in those days, it was believed that everything that was bad must have some connection with him. However, this could not be the Hindu version because in Hindu version, the roc fought against Rawana. Therefore the roc could not possibly be a descendant of Rawana. Some storytellers said, the roc that came to stay in Langkawi was the roc that appeared in the story of *Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa*. Nothing was told about his origin in the story.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

The story of the Langkawi Garuda as told in the *Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa* has something to do with the founding of the State of Kedah in the old days. It was said to have occurred in the reign of the great Prophet, King Solomon. In those days King Solomon was the king of the earth. All emperors, kings, humans, genies, animals, birds, and insects paid homage to him. King Solomon was reputed to have the unusual power of knowing the languages of birds, insects, animals and of course, humans. He was a Messenger of God and possessed supernatural powers so powerful that no one on earth could do him any harm. No one would therefore dare to disobey him. He would mete out punishments on those who disobeyed his teachings, among which was to worship God the Almighty. Everyone, whether human or animal was taught to do good deeds. When anyone wanted to do anything important, permission must first be obtained from the great King otherwise he or she could be severely punished.

The story of the roc as told in *Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa* was the Langkawi Garuda. The story on the bird in this book, compared to other Malay books, was quite long. There was also a moral to the story, that no one should be over confident of one's own power to the extent of disregarding the more superior power of God. This story was most probably written during the reign of Sultan Muazzam Syah of Kedah whose reign was between 1179 and 1201. The Sultan was the second ruler to embrace the Islamic faith after the coming of Islam. The first was Sultan Mudzaffar Syah.

In those days not many people could read or write. Those who could read and write would be considered to be very wise

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

indeed. They would be taken into the court to serve the sultan. The sultan alone had the authority to command any of the court writers to write on any subject concerning the country, including its history. The following is the story as told in this book, *Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa*, written by one of these court writers. From the preamble, we learned that the author was instructed to write on "the rules affecting the kings and sultans including the royal ceremonies and their history". *Hikayat* means story. To avoid any confusion with other rocs, the roc in this story will be called Garuda, his name in the story.

Garuda lived in a big beautiful palace which he constructed for himself in the main island of Langkawi, the biggest island in the group. There are 102 other islands, big and small that surround the main island. It is on this main island that the main harbour, Bas Harbour is situated. Bas was named after Abbas, captain of a ferry who used to carry passengers from Kuala Perlis and Kuah and back. He stopped his ferry at this harbour and soon the harbour came to be known as Bas Harbour. Bas was the short name of Abbas. During the time of Garuda, Langkawi and all the other islands were not inhabited by humans. They all feared the Garuda. All the other islands, villages, mountains, and lakes were then yet to be named.

According to the story, in those days there were two big kingdoms, one in the sub-continent of India, called Rum and the other, China. The emperors of these two kingdoms desirous of bringing closer ties between the two kingdoms and hoping to make each of them even greater, arranged a royal marriage between their two children, the crown prince of Rum and the princess of China.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Some writers wrote the country's name Rum as Rome. The confusion arose from the *jawi* version which used Arabic characters. The word spelt in *jawi* could be pronounced as either Rum or Rome. The original book, *Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa*, as many other old Malay manuscripts, was written in *jawi*. The reason is, Arabic alphabets came earlier to this part of the world than the Roman alphabets. The Arabic alphabets were first used around the year 1200 A.D. The Roman alphabets about 1500 A.D. The textbook used in the Malay schools before the Second World War, *Chanai Bacaan* was in *jawi*. In this book there was a short story of the Garuda. Most teachers read the name of the Indian Empire as Rome. This was most probably because Rome was more known to them at that time.

For this reason, most writers wrote the country as Rome when they reprinted the story in Roman characters. Rome had never been associated with the roc except with the phoenix. Whereas in India, where Rum was, the roc, at some places was part of their religion. For the same reason, the Arabic spelling *rukḥ* for roc could have been roc, because in the Arabic alphabets there is no vowel for "o".

To return to our story, all arrangements having been made, the Emperor of Rum prepared a big fleet to send his son to China for the wedding. The king chose a great warrior, Merong Maha Wangsa, to head the expedition. Merong Maha Wangsa was reputed to be a descendant of a king from the fairyland where, according to the Malays, fairies, males and females lived. The male fairy was called *Dewa* and the female, *Dewi*. These were Sanskrit words. Merong Maha Wangsa was well versed

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

in the art of wars and endowed with many supernatural powers. On an auspicious day, the fleet set sail for China.

The Garuda learnt of the impending marriage from another bird named Rajawali, an eagle. Rajawali and his wife flew to the island from the mainland and asked permission from the Garuda to stay in Langkawi. He gave the eagles the permission to stay. That is why at one time you could see a lot of eagles in Langkawi. Many, however, had been shot by poachers because their carcass when stuffed, made beautiful decoration. They gradually became extinct. Now the eagles, under the law, are protected birds. Their numbers are increasing again. It is a sheer joy to watch these eagles as they glide in the clouds above the hills of Langkawi.

It so happened that at that time the Garuda was rather bored with life. He had nothing much to do in his palace except eating and sleeping. He set his mind to have some sport by preventing the marriage. Some storytellers said the reason why Garuda wanted to wreck the marriage was because he was jealous of any marriage. The Garuda was said to be the only roc in the whole wide world. In this story there was no mention of a female roc. Garuda therefore could not possibly get married. So when he heard any couple marrying he would bemoan his fate. He did not mind much if any such marriage was held quietly. But in this case, two big emperors were making such a grand arrangement on such a big scale and with such publicity that he just could not tolerate it. So he set his mind to scuttle the ships and to wreck the marriage.



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Garuda was aware that he had to get King Solomon's permission to carry out his plan otherwise he would land himself into trouble. So he flew to Solomon's palace and had an audience with the sage. He asked Solomon's permission that he be permitted to prevent the marriage between the two kingdoms. When King Solomon asked him why he wanted to do so, he replied that if these two kingdoms were united, they would become too powerful that they might endanger the peace of the earth. This was the reason Garuda had cooked up before he came to the palace.

King Solomon knew this was not the true reason. So he warned the bird that no one could go against the will of God. He told Garuda that if the couple were fated by God to marry one another, no power on the earth could prevent it.

In spite of the warning, Garuda was adamant. He boasted to King Solomon that he could carry out the work easily and continued to ask Solomon's permission. He said he was confident that he could succeed because he was strong and powerful, being the biggest bird in the world and fully equipped with supernatural powers. He even went to tell Solomon that if he failed to carry out such a simple job, he would withdraw himself from this earth and that he would go away and live in another world. King Solomon gave him the permission with a heavy heart. He knew that the big bird had committed a grave crime in failing to acknowledge the superior power of the Almighty God.

Garuda upon getting the permission, flew out of Solomon's palace happily. He had to think out a plan of action. He flew to

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

China to the emperor's palace and caught hold of the princess and a few of her maids and flew them back to his palace in Langkawi. There he kept them so as to prevent any possibility of marriage. He wanted to be doubly sure of the success of his scheme. He took good care of the princess and her maids by giving them food and their daily needs. He even went back to China, at the request of the princess, to get her and her maids sufficient clothes to wear. In spite of having everything that she needed, the princess was sad. She was kept away from home and from her parents. She was also disappointed to think of her marriage being frustrated. It was the event that she was eagerly looking forward to. She wept whenever Garuda was away, but put up a brave face when the bird was around.

After having the princess safely settled down in Langkawi, Garuda went to search for the fleet of the bridegroom. He eventually found it. The fleet was still in the Indian Ocean moving slowly towards China. He immediately attacked the ships and tried to sink all of them. Merong Maha Wangsa and the other warriors in the ships fought back using all their supernatural powers. But it was Merong Maha Wangsa who alone could repulse every attack by Garuda. He managed to fend off every move of the big bird. Thus Garuda failed to sink a single ship on his first attempt. He flew away and took a rest on a nearby island. He was bitterly disappointed. What he thought was an easy task, had turned out to be not so easy after all.

Then he flew back to the place where the fleet was for another attack. He created strong winds blowing on the ships, causing big storms around the fleet. The ships rocked and col-

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

lided with one another dangerously. Garuda tried to make use of the commotion to swoop down on the ships and to sink them. Merong Maha Wangsa drew his magic arrow and shot it into the sky. The arrow flew buzzing with the speed of lightning. From the arrow a big mountain suddenly appeared in the sky which shielded the winds from blowing towards the ships. The sea became calm again. The ships stopped rocking. They were saved although some were damaged in the collision.

Garuda tried to sink the ships again for the third time. His intention was to seize two ships at one time, one in each claws, and fly high with them and later drop them into the sea below. So he circled round the fleet looking for an opening to swoop down. Merong Maha Wangsa on seeing this, took out his bow again and using a more powerful arrow, shot it into the clear sky. Lo and behold, the arrow suddenly turned itself into another bird, called Jentayu, as big as Garuda himself. Both the birds fought one another for a long time. Eventually Jentayu lost after receiving a big peck on the chest with a ray of flames from Garuda's beak. Jentayu burst into flames and after burning itself out it turned back into an arrow and flew back to its scabbard.

Garuda, disappointed and tired, flew back to Langkawi for another rest. He now realised that it was not such an easy task as he had originally thought to wreck the fleet. He could have allowed the fleet to proceed to China. Without the princess there could be no marriage. Garuda, however, could not allow this to happen. He could not accept defeat from these diminutive creatures in the ships. They must be punished. Fur-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

thermore, if the prince were to arrive in China, the emperor might marry him off to another of his princess. The emperor was known to have many wives and concubines, and so must have a lot of princesses. Garuda thought this should not be allowed to take place.

In the meantime, the wedding fleet from Rum continued on its way. To their relief and joy, there were no attacks from Garuda for the next three days. There was no sign of the big bird. The wedding party were jubilant as they thought that Garuda had given up the idea of attacking them. They thought he had been taught a lesson. So they let down their guard and continued with their journey singing, beating drums and dancing joyfully as normally done by a wedding party.

They came to an island where they stopped to repair their ships and to replenish fresh water and firewood. After having done these, all the other ships were instructed to continue. The ship in which Merong Maha Wangsa was travelling had not finished collecting water and firewood, being the last to do so. The rest of the ships proceeded slowly to enable Merong Maha Wangsa's ship to catch up with them.

As fate would have it, at this particular time Garuda decided to attack the fleet. Without Merong Maha Wangsa to fight him, the fleet was a mere pawn to the mighty Garuda. Every ship was sunk to the bottom of the sea, including the one that was carrying the bridegroom. Garuda waited for a while to see any sign of life. He saw none. He was overjoyed. He burst into a big laugh which sounded like a thunder. His mission, he

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

thought was accomplished. The bridegroom was already dead and the princess was with him in Langkawi. Therefore there could be no possibility of a wedding. King Solomon would now have some respect for him, he mused.

Garuda flew back to Langkawi. As always he was glad to see his little princess every time that he landed in his palace. He had grown very fond of her. Since she came to live with him, she had somewhat brought cheer and sunshine to his dreary palace. Now it was full of life, with the princess and her maids running and moving around. He loved the princess like his own daughter. Her laughter and smile brought sheer joy to his lonely heart. He sometimes even asked her and her maids to sleep under his wings at night when the weather was too cold outside.

Indeed in the Merong Maha Wangsa story, we were told that Garuda called the princess *anakanda* (daughter) and she in turn called him *ayahanda* (father). These two words were normally used in palaces or among the Malay nobles. He did not know whether she was sincere towards him in calling him father or just to humour him because of her fear of him. But whatever her real feelings were, he was satisfied and happy. To please her, he would do anything she asked him to do – short of taking her back to China. He even thought of finding her a husband. After a few years she and her husband would have lots of children. They all would then live happily together under the same roof. Garuda thought those human chicks were cute and a joy to play with. He would no longer be lonely and would not object to human marriages any more.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Soon Merong Maha Wangsa came to the scene of the destruction. He saw pieces of wood and dead bodies floating. There was no sign of any ship left floating. He searched for the prince and other survivors and could not find any. He realised that he should not have allowed the fleet to proceed without him. He was very sad as he had failed his king. He vowed not to return home unless the prince was found. He then set sail and reached the river mouth of Merbuk River along the coast of a country now known as Kedah. He went ashore and camped there for a few days, all the time thinking what he should do.

It so happened that that country was at that time without a king. The people there came to know that Merong Maha Wangsa was a descendant from the fairyland and so was most fitted to be their king. They approached him with the request and he consented. They subsequently elected him to be their king. A big ceremony was held for the occasion. At that time the country was still without a name. He named it Langkasuka, meaning "So Happy." He chose this name because he wanted to forget the unhappy incident where his prince was lost and many of his men were killed. Merong Maha Wangsa ruled the country wisely and it prospered. All the while he waited to hear the news of the prince.

Langkasuka was eventually named Kedah. The change took place when Islam came to Langkasuka some time in 1136 A.D. *Kedah* is an Arabic word meaning a glass with a leg. The name "Merong Maha Wangsa" was revered until today. There is a high award for meritorious service in the palace of the Sultan of Kedah, styled as Datuk Maha Wangsa. It is something like a

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

lord. Wangsa is also a name of a parliamentary constituency in Kuala Lumpur. It means a royal descendant.

Meanwhile, the bridegroom prince whose ship was sunk by Garuda, miraculously survived. He hid himself underneath some broken planks which he held above his head as he floated in the direction of the current. So he could not be seen from the air. It so happened the place his fleet was sunk was not very far from Langkawi. He was washed up to the island by the waves and was stuck between some rocks where he lingered for a number of days. He became weak being without food and water. He was reduced to a skeleton. The prince being used to palace life, where he had everything under his command, could not stand the suffering which fate had caused him. He wept and moaned in a long weak voice like the voice of a small bird being fed by its mother.

It so happened one day a maid of the Chinese princess came to the beach to bathe and she heard the weeping. The maid went to investigate and saw the prince. She was frightened because of his hideous appearance. He was covered with sea weeds. She thought that he was a water ghost. She ran away and told her friends who later flocked to the place. They all looked at him. He indeed looked like a ghost. Little shells had made their home on his flesh-less body. They could see his black eyes with tears dropping slowly as if pleading to them to take pity on him. They heard his human moan. Eventually they were convinced that he was not a ghost.

They took the prince to the palace and showed him to the princess who instructed them to give him a thorough wash. They

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

gave him some water to drink. After that they washed him. They scraped the sea weeds and shells from his body. After they had finished washing him, they gave him their clothes to wear and after that they gave him food to eat. At first they only gave him a small amount. But after his stomach had been accustomed to the food, they gradually increased the amount.

After he had sufficiently rested, they asked him who he was. He told them. The princess was very happy as fate had unexpectedly joined her with her betrothed. At first she did not tell him who she was. He therefore could not help wondering how a beautiful girl could be living in that place without any other persons except a few maids. Luckily at that time Garuda was away. They hid him in a cave, Gua Cerita, which was not far away and was easily accessible from Garuda's palace.

Soon the prince regained his strength and his old self again. He was indeed a very handsome young man with a character befitting a person of such noble birth. He and the princess fell in love and the princess told him who she was. The prince was overjoyed on hearing this. Soon they got married in a ceremony arranged by the maids. The maids constructed a makeshift altar and placed some fruits and food on it. The couple dressed in their finest costume that they could have, bowed towards the altar three times and then towards each other three times. They then offered each other tea which they drank. It was a simple ceremony. They did not mind, as long as they were together. It was quite hilarious too, as the prince was dressed in a girl's clothing belonging to the princess. He had no other dress to wear.



#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

Fate had brought them together in an unexpected way. They never expected it to happen this way. They vowed not to leave one another. For the prince it was easy to hide from Garuda. He could easily ascertain when the Garuda was coming back. The sunlight in the whole island would be overshadowed by the wings of Garuda as he approached the island with a thunderous noise. As soon as this happened the prince would run into the cave and hide. So the big bird never knew that the prince was alive and was staying with him. At times the prince would come out from the cave stealthily at night and would sleep and enjoy the conjugal bliss with the princess under his very wing.

After some time, Garuda was convinced that he had managed to wreck the marriage between the two people. He confidently concluded that his mission had been accomplished. He flew to the court of King Solomon to report to the king of his wonderful achievement. He proudly recounted to Solomon how he had succeeded sinking all the ships that were going to China and had taken the Chinese princess to stay with him. After Garuda had finished recounting, Solomon ordered a genie king by the name Herman Shah to go and fetch the prince and the princess from Garuda's own palace in Langkawi.

In a twinkling of an eye, the genie king accompanied by ten other genies brought the prince, the princess and all the maids in a glass box to Solomon's court. They placed the box in front of Solomon. The genie king then opened the box and the prince, the princess and all the maids came out on their bended knees as they paid respect to King Solomon.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Solomon asked the prince who he was and how he came to be together with the princess. The prince told the king how he escaped from the shipwreck, how he was washed ashore to the island of Langkawi, how the princess saved his life, how he hid himself in a cave and how he married the princess. When asked how he got his food, he replied that he shared the food of the princess and her maids which was brought to them by Garuda. Asked whether Garuda had ever seen him, the prince replied that Garuda had occasionally seen him at night when he was with the princess. He said that Garuda mistook him to be one of the maids because he dressed himself in the clothes of one of the maid. The prince went on to tell that he and the princess had occasionally slept together at night under one of the wings of Garuda. Everyone in the court laughed when they heard this.

The princess then told Solomon how Garuda took her from her palace in China to stay with him in Langkawi. She related how one of the maids had seen the prince near the seashore among the rocks. They saved him and that she and the prince were eventually married by her maids in a simple tea drinking ceremony.

Garuda was amazed with what had happened. He shook his head in disbelief. He had become a laughing stock in the court. He looked down, not daring to lift his face. His big white wings were hanging down touching the floor. At the same time he was afraid of the punishment that King Solomon might impose on him for being so overbearing and conceited. He moved forward and bowed before Solomon and without lifting his head, admitted that he had erred and that he had committed a sinful

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

act in ignoring the powers of God, the Almighty. He asked for forgiveness. He said he was prepared to accept any punishment that the King would deem fit for him.

King Solomon said in a loud voice so that everyone in his court could hear, "Garuda, I have told you before, that if God willed something be done, then it would be done. No one in this world could change His will. I also told you that if a couple is fated by God to marry one another, then no power could prevent it. Just look at this case, God had willed it that the couple should become husband and wife. So in spite of your great strength and power, you could not prevent it. In your attempt to do so, you have killed many innocent people. It was just to satisfy your lust. That is the reason why we creatures whenever we want to do something, we have to fall back on the power of God, by saying, 'If God wills it.' By using this phrase, we are acknowledging His powers and that He is our Creator and that He alone can grant or deny our wish."

The Garuda did not say anything. He was so ashamed that he wept. Tears came down from his brown eyes, each drop as big as a big melon. It came gushing down like a waterfall. Fearing that his tears might wet the King's red and blue carpet, he tried to stop crying. But he could not do so. As a result a portion of the carpet was wet. But no one in the court seemed to notice it. The most cruel thing that happened to him was, not only he failed to wreck the marriage, but the prince and the princess got married in his own palace. Worse still, they had even enjoyed their marital bliss under his own, literally, wings. That hurt him most. He could not blame the princess. He was

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

solely to be blamed. He had tried to wreck her happiness. She had the right to despise him for the misery he brought to her.

King Solomon then sentenced him to withdraw from the world and to reside in another world as he had promised to do before and never to return to earth. Garuda bowed his head in respect of the great man and flew out of the palace. He was somewhat relieved with the punishment as he had expected that King Solomon would hand down to him a stiffer sentence. The sentence was the one he had promised to do in the event of his failure to carry out what he had undertaken.

Garuda was glad to go away. He felt so ashamed that he could not bear to face anyone in this world. He was glad to leave this world and never to return. In the story, it was said he went to live on the shores of Kalzom Ocean, outside this world where no human had ever been there.

King Solomon then ordered the King of Genie to take the prince and the princess and all the maids to China and hand them over to the emperor to be married again in accordance with rites befitting a great emperor. He also asked the genie to convey the happy news to the Emperor of Rum that by God's will, his son was safe and sound and was in China to be wed to the Chinese princess as had been arranged and as willed by God.

Merong Maha Wangsa subsequently heard of the good news that the prince was alive and had married the Chinese princess in China. He was overjoyed. He decided to go back to

#### GARUDA (THE GIANT BIRD)

Rum. He made preparations. After he had installed his son, Merong Mahapudisat as the new king of Langkasuka, he returned to Rum to serve his emperor.

With Garuda gone and other rocs killed by men with supernatural powers, or had simply died from natural causes, the roc species are now extinct. We cannot find any more rocs in this world now. It is a great pity. We are now deprived of the joy of looking at them gliding in the clear blue sky as we do with the eagles. Even during the time of Solomon, the rocs were already an endangered species. There was only one left. Whilst the other rocs before him were either killed or died of old age, Garuda had vanquished himself from the earth through his own folly. His conceit and disregard of the power of God caused his downfall.

# The White Crocodile

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Once upon a time, there was a beautiful country situated at the northern tip of the Malay Peninsula. In those old days the country was called Langkasuka. It is now called Kedah Darul Aman. *Kedah* is said to have originated from an Arabic word meaning glass with legs or a wooden bowl. *Darul* is also Arabic, meaning country and *aman* is also Arabic, meaning peaceful. The country had a sultan who was a good ruler. He ruled the country wisely. As a result, the country was peaceful and prosperous. The people in the country were mostly either paddy planters or fishermen. They all loved the sultan.

Many traders from afar, on hearing that the country was prosperous and the sultan just, crossed over the ocean to Kedah in order to do business. As a result the country grew to be more prosperous and the people more happy. The people prayed that

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

their sultan would always be in good health and lived a long life so that he could continue to rule them for a long time to come.

The sultan had one hobby that he loved. He liked to hunt. He would go to every nook and corner of his realm to search for game. He was an expert hunter. He could shoot an arrow in between the eyes of the game or just behind the ear which was a more vulnerable spot. He hunted from an elephant's back armed with a bow and arrows. He shot deer or wild buffaloes using poisoned arrows. After being shot the animal would be in a daze and then would fall. His men then would rush up to the wounded animal and slaughter it.

The sultan's favourite hunting place was the main island of Langkawi where there were plenty of mousedeer at that time. He was however equally happy hunting on foot whenever he hunted mousedeer. There was no danger from these animals as they were small animals. One full grown mousedeer was only as big as a full grown cat. To hunt the mousedeer he need not have to use poisoned arrows. An ordinary arrow would be sufficient to bring the animal down.

In the service of the sultana, the sultan's beautiful consort, was a young maid, named Telani. She was indeed the court's beauty and sometimes mistaken to be a princess, particularly whenever she was with the sultana. Her beauty was at times described as like the full moon. In Malay literature, the phrase to describe a beautiful woman is, "Cantik seperti bulan purnama." Literally translated, it means, "As beautiful as the

#### THE WHITE CROCODILE

full moon." It simply means that the girl was exceptionally beautiful.

Telani indeed was beautiful. Her friends told her so. She enjoyed it, but she had never been conceited of her beauty. She served the sultana well. Whenever the sultana wanted to have something, Telani was there to hand it over. If the thing was not available, she would go out of her way to get it. If the sultana forgot something, Telani was there to remind her. Whenever the sultana fell slightly sick, Telani was there to hand her the required medication. Naturally the sultana loved her as if she was one of her next-of-kin and would never be without her around, except, of course, whenever she was in the bedroom with the sultan.

Being with the sultana most of the time, Telani had little opportunity to be with men of her age. At 21, she was a full woman eager for love and be loved. But there was no young man around the court who dared to woo her. She was so close to the sultana that to seek her hand in marriage might cause displeasure of the sultana. In those old days, even the words of the sultana was law. One false move might cause one's life. So Telani, in spite of her beauty was without a boyfriend. In those old days, when marriage was always arranged by parents, a girl of 21 was already considered an old maid. Telani's parents did not make an arrangement for her marriage for fear of the displeasure of the sultana.

There was one young warrior in the court of the sultan who was the most handsome among the others. He was tall,



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

erect and had a fine body. His skin was dark brown and smooth. His shining black hair reached his shoulders. He sported a narrow moustache that looked like a cockerel's spurs. His teeth were pearl white and were flawless. Telani always saw him at the court. She gradually began to like him. That were times when she had to escort the sultana to the court where there were social functions requiring the presence of the sultana. Sometimes Telani caught him stealthily looking at her. When she looked back at him, he looked away. She longed to see him and to talk to him.

She later made discreet inquiries. She learnt that his name was Telanai, a name that was almost like her own. Could it be that they were fated to live together? she mused. She further learnt that he was the prime minister's son. On learning this, her hope of marrying him was dashed. She, being a mere maid, should not entertain any lofty idea of marrying the son of a noble of the country, especially the son of the prime minister.

Unknown to her, Telanai, like many other warriors, was also head over heels in love with her. He did not mind that she was a maid. To him everyone was the same – a human. He tried to see her alone to confess his love for her. It was not easy. She was always with the sultana. The palace was out of bounds for any other male except the sultan. Any man found even loitering there would be assumed to have an evil intention and would be mercilessly put to death. This was the only logical conclusion because in the palace there were only princesses, young princes, maids, and trusted servants. Even older princes were required to live in other palaces and not there.

## THE WHITE CROCODILE

The opportunity for Telanai to talk to Telani one night presented itself. It came this way. The sultan and sultana were invited to the wedding of a daughter of a nobleman. Telanai was one warrior, among others, commmanded to escort the sultan and Telani was one of the maids to escort the sultana. The sultan and sultana arrived after the other nobles had arrived. They were seated in a special place in front of the wedding dais. On the dais were the wedded couple seated side by side. Those who escorted the sultan and the sultana had to be somewhere else but not too far away.

Telanai took the opportunity and looked for Telani. He saw her among the maids. He tip-toed up behind her and tried to be as near her as possible. In spite of the fact that he was a brave warrior, in this love affair, he was scared. He found himself shivering. He could not understand it. He had faced hundreds of enemies in the battlefields. He was not afraid. Here he found himself shivering just because he was approaching a maid. Perhaps there was a fear of being repulsed by her that he could not bear. He dared not therefore accost her, even though he was just behind her. He could even whisper to her and she could hear it. But he said nothing. He just kept still, close behind her. He could even smell the jasmine flowers that decorated her hair. He continued to shiver like a lost child. Whenever she turned round to look at him, he would look away. He wanted to pretend that he was behind her by accident and not by intent.

Telani, however, had seen him before as he crossed over to her. She saw him tip-toeing. She correctly guessed that the way that Telanai was acting, he wanted to be near her and to

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

talk to her. He could be in love with her and that he was trying to reach her. She was, however, a little more courageous. Unlike warriors, maids were always more playful and cheeky among themselves. Telani was always playful and sometimes played pranks on other maids. Warriors were, however, always serious and solemn, because most probably, they always faced death and had seen many deaths. Deaths were never beautiful.

Telani smiled to herself as she felt the presence of Telanai behind her. For her, she too had long yearned to speak to him. She had dreamed many dreams of him and had come to love him, although from afar. This was an opportunity for her to speak to him and learn whether he loved her or was merely interested in flirting with her. She then stepped backwards to be by his side, looked into his eyes, and gave him a big smile. She saw him smiling back at her in a most wonderful way.

For Telanai, what had just happened was something unexpected. He was so naive that he did not suspect that Telani had also loved him. His joy knew no bounds. It was what the Malay proverb say, "Seperti bulan jatuh ke riba." It means that the joy was so great that it was as if the moon had fallen on one's lap. They then spoke in subdued voices about the love each felt for each other. Now Telanai became braver. He held the right hand of Telani with his left hand and squeezed it gently as they pretended to look and enjoy the wedding ceremony. They managed to hide their clasped hands with Telani's blue shawl which she, as a maid, had to wear.

Soon the wedding ceremony ended. Telani had to rush to the sultana and Telanai to the sultan as they were preparing to

#### THE WHITE CROCODILE

leave the place. Telanai gave another big squeeze on Telani's hand and a big smile as he was leaving her. She smiled back at him. From that time, they knew there was nothing that could separate their love for each other.

The new lovebirds soon found out that it was not easy to see each other as much as they liked. Telani had always to be with the sultana. Telanai was sometimes sent by the the sultan out of the country to carry out some important state duties. Sometimes he had to escort the sultan in his hunting expeditions. Telani managed, however, on a number of occasions, to sneak out from the palace and joined Telanai in the palace garden. Each meeting had, of course, to be prearranged. Each of such clandestine meeting was a precious moment for the lovers, although very dangerous. With the end of each meeting, they looked forward to the next meeting.

Telanai was a good warrior. He was brave, capable and loyal to the sultan. He had proved himself worthy as a warrior in many battlefields. The sultan loved him very much. In every hunting expedition, the sultan would without fail ask Telanai to accompany him. Telanai proved himself to be a good hunter too. He had brought down with his arrows many game including tigers and wild buffaloes. He managed many times to successfully drive game into the path of the sultan's elephant to be shot by the sultan.

As had been the custom in those old days, Telanai was not permitted to wed Telani on the grounds that he was a prime minister's son and of royal blood. Telani was a mere maid in the court. She was a daughter of a commoner. Further it was

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

the custom in the court that no man could wed any of the court girls in the service of the palace unless they were dismissed from the service or until consent had been obtained by either the sultan or sultana. Such consent was rarely given. Most of the consents previously given were those where a maid wished to marry a manservant working in the same palace. They could then continue to work in the palace. But never in the case of a maid wishing to wed a man of noble birth whether inside or outside the palace.

Being in the service of the court, both Telani and Telanai knew these rules only too well. Drowned in love, both Telani and Telanai, did not take these rules seriously. When their love became more serious, they began to get worried. They wanted to get married and live a happy life with children and grandchildren. Now they saw their future was bleak. They cursed the day when one of them was born a maid and the other a nobleman. The difference in their status wrecked their life.

So Telanai and Telani met secretly at every opportunity to quench their love for one another. In the meantime they thought of ways how to avoid the court rule. They could of course marry secretly, but Telani, being a virgin, under the law, must have the permission of her father first before she could marry. Her father would never give the permission unless the sultan and sultana first consented. To dispense with the father's consent would require the authorisation of the *imam* and the holy man would never authorise it, since her father was still living to give the necessary permission under the law. Eventually they decided on a daring plan. They decided to go and ask the con-

#### THE WHITE CROCODILE

sent of the sultana and if she had no objection, they would go to plead before the sultan. This was a dangerous plan. By doing so, they might forfeit their lives. Yet they had no other way.

In their frustration, their love for one another grew to be more serious. They continued to see one another. Meeting a loved one in the dark proved to be dangerous. Their feelings ran high until they could no longer control themselves. They eventually consummated their love for one another. They knew this was a very dangerous thing to do. Yet they could not help themselves. Once it started, there was no way of stopping it.

The coast of Langkasuka was at the same time swarmed with pirates. The pirates made their home in Langkawi. They came in long rowing boats, armed to the teeth. Any boat stopping in Langkawi for water and food would be plundered without mercy. The sailors were killed. The news was relayed to the sultan who at once ordered the prime minister to arrange for an expedition to go to Langkawi to put down the piracy. Telanai was chosen to lead the expedition.

Before leaving, Telanai managed to see Telani who, between sobs, gave him her scarf to wear while he was away. He accepted the scarf and left with a heavy heart. This was the first time he had to be separated from her. He knew the fight against the pirates might be a long one. He did not know whether he would be able to come back or not. He had no alternative but to go. It was the command of the sultan. So on an auspicious Wednesday morning, Telanai set out to Langkawi with one hundred warriors in ten long boats in search of the cursed pirates.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

In the meantime back in the palace, Telani, to her horror, found that she was pregnant. She in fact had tried to avoid the pregnancy by eating a number of herbs that she had learnt from her aunts in order to prevent pregnancy. It appeared the herbs had failed her miserably. At the seventh month, the bulge in front of her became too big to hide her pregnancy. Soon all her friends came to know about it.

The sultana also noticed it. When she was certain that it was pregnancy, she informed the sultan. Everyone in the court knew that Telani was not married. Even if she were to drink the water from Lake of the Pregnant Maid (*Tasik Dayang Bunting*) but without a man, no woman could conceive. (By drinking water from this lake, it was believed that it could make a woman pregnant). So they knew that Telani must have committed adultery. The sultan ordered that she be detained in one of the rooms and asked the chief guard to find out from her who was responsible for her condition.

Telani refused to tell who was responsible, although the chief guard repeatedly asked her and even tortured her. The sultan was in a quandary. He could not sentence her to death because the law stipulated that no pregnant woman should be put to death. By putting a pregnant woman to death, it would also mean putting the baby inside her to death. The innocent child inside her womb would also be punished. Even if she had given birth, still the sentence of death could not be carried out because the child would require her to be alive to exercise his or her right to suckle the milk from her breast. Only after the child had been weaned off that the execution could be carried out. This was the law and as a just sultan he had to follow it.

#### THE WHITE CROCODILE

The sultan did not want to keep her in the palace too long. She must be put away. She was a bad example. He consulted the prime minister and the sultana. The sultana suggested that she be banished instead. The sultana in making this suggestion wanted to save Telani from death as a reward for her faithful service. The prime minister agreed that it was a good idea. He did not realise at that time that it was his son who had caused the problem. The sultan also agreed. So he ordered that Telani be banished to Pulau Dayang Bunting which was at that time still uninhabited. They all expected her to be repentant of her evil act while she was alone at the lake.

Telani was taken to the island in a boat and was left there alone. She wept and lamented her fate as being too cruel to her. She was left to face life alone in the island. She wished that Telanai was with her at that moment. They had enjoyed happiness and bliss together and perhaps it would not be too much to ask that they shared the misery together. But Telani knew that it was wrong to ask for this to happen. It was wicked and selfish. She therefore changed her wish that no one would know of Telanai's involvement in her condition and that he be safe and victorious in his fight against the pirates. Then she suddenly hoped that she might one day meet him again on the island.

In the meantime Telanai continued to search for the pirates. The pirates knew that they were being hunted with a large army of warriors. To hide, they pulled up their boats inland and disappeared among the villagers. Telanai and his men could not make them out. Sometimes they hid themselves among the 102 clusters of islands. Telanai persevered. Eventually he found



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

them in Selat Pancor and he engaged them there. Both sides lost a lot of lives. Telanai and his men managed to defeat the pirates. Some were killed and some were taken prisoners. Only a few managed to escape. Telanai and his men returned home triumphantly taking with them the prisoners and the treasures left by the pirates. They went straight to the court to pay homage to the sultan and handed to him all the treasures. The prisoners were handed to the *temenggung*, who was in charge of the security of the country.

The sultan was very happy and rewarded Telanai and his men each with a *sepersalinan* in accordance with the status of each warrior. A *sepersalinan* was in accordance with the Malay court custom, a full Malay dress complete with the headgear, waistband and kris to be worn on important occasions. It was considered to be a precious gift by the sultan. Only those people who rendered valuable services to the sultan or those who had been appointed to an important post, would be honoured with this award. The higher the status of the recipient, the more valuable the gift would be.

Telanai went home happily. He longed to see his Telani and be with her as soon as possible. Being long in Langkawi, he really missed her. He thought of her often. Even during his fight against the pirates, he still could not forget her. He thanked God that he was safe and was able to see her again. He would later be able to hear her speak and smell her flesh as he took her in his arms. He would squeeze some presents into her hands and wished he could see her smile in the dark as she accepted his gifts.

#### THE WHITE CROCODILE

His parents were very happy to see him safely back home. They gave him home cooked food, including rice pudding which he was fond of. He later washed himself. He then waited patiently for the night to come, for he could only see Telani secretly at night. He knew the signal as to how to get her down into the garden. He had to sit patiently at the agreed spot in the garden slapping mosquitoes as silently as possible while waiting for her come. But to him, this was worth it. At the same time he thanked God for during these years, no one discovered their clandestine meetings.

As soon as the sun set, he put on beautiful new clothes and applied some perfume on his face, behind his ears and underneath his armpits. In fact it was not necessary to put on fine clothes as she could not see it at night. Yet, Telanai thought, if one were to pay audience before the sultan, one wore his best clothes. Then why should not one wear the best when one saw his own beloved? The perfume? Yes, it was necessary as one could smell even in the dark. When the time was approaching midnight he cautiously hurried to the palace.

However, when he reached the court, he was told by one of the guards that Telani had been banished to Pulau Dayang Bunting for adultery. Telanai was disappointed and angry. He loved Telani so much that he could not bear to hear that she was left alone on that remote island. Furthermore, he was equally responsible. He was suddenly seized with a fit of rage. He ran amok and tried to kill anyone who came near him. His father was informed. The prime minister rushed to the palace and calmed his son. The old man reminded him not to be dis-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

loyal to his own sultan. Telanai eventually calmed down and sat down sobbing. He confessed that he was responsible for Telani's pregnancy. He asked that he too be banished to Pulau Dayang Bunting, so that the same punishment be given to him as to Telani. The sultan agreed and ordered that Telanai be taken to the island to join Telani there. Now justice was done. Both parties who committed the act were punished.

In the meantime, Telani by the lake gave birth to a healthy son. Telani breast-fed him and placed him gently near the lake. Suddenly the child struggled vigorously and glided down into the lake. It appeared the child glided into the lake on his own free will. Telani had earlier placed him on a place that sloped in the opposite direction of the lake. He could not therefore easily slide down into the lake without great efforts. Telani cried when she saw her child falling into the lake, but she did not have time to save him.

She looked at the lake where her child had submerged. She intended to jump into the water and save her son. But at that very moment, a big white crocodile surfaced at the very spot where her son had submerged. The crocodile looked up at her with love and affection. It shook its head as if to dissuade her from jumping. Telani then knew that the crocodile was her son who had turned himself into a white crocodile.

At that moment Telanai arrived at the island. As fate would have it, Gedembai was there on the beach. She saw the handsome Telanai and fell in love with him. She tried to attract his attention, but Telanai would have none of her. Instead he was looking elsewhere for Telani. Gedembai was angry with such

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

an insult. She had never been ingroed before by men. So she cursed him to be an island that later came to be known as Pulau Tajai. Gedembai then walked towards the lake and saw Telani. She correctly suspected Telani was the cause of Telanai rejecting her. So she cursed Telani to be a stone that came to be known as Batu Dayang or the Stone Maid. This stone and Pulau Tajai faced one another as if they did not want to lose sight of one another. It was as if it was their wish that their love for one another love would be forever fresh and never ending.

It was said that the child in sliding himself into the lake chose not to be turned into something lifeless by the Gedembai. The child had seen it coming. By turning himself into a crocodile, he could go on living and at the same time he could look after the lake that he loved. Since then, no one was permitted to do any dirty act by the side of the lake or use abusive language or bathe naked there. Those who did so would be punished by the white crocodile. The people of Langkawi eventually came to regard the white crocodile as sacred.

Thus, both the Pulau Dayang Bunting and the Tasik Dayang Bunting contributed their fair share in making Langkawi an island rich in legends. These legends have created a mysticism of the hidden beauty of the island which has helped to bring fame to her as one of the most beautiful and mysterious islands in the world.

## **The Animal Legends**

The second chapter consists of two animal stories i.e. “Garuda” and “The White Crocodile”. Garuda is a kind of very large bird found in several different legends in countries such as India, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, China and in Peninsular Malaya itself.

Garuda is a symbol of power, strength, cruelty and destruction. In Malay literature there are a number of stories about Garuda. For example, the tale of Si Siton, Syair Agung and the Hikayat Malim Deman. In these tales the Garuda has power and superiority.

The tale “Sinbad the Sailor” in the One Thousand and One Nights of the Arabian Night fame revolves around the fact that with the power of Garuda. He has saved himself and finally become prosperous. This means that the powerful Garuda could help save other people so they can live in peace and harmony.

There are also other imaginative tales about the superiority of Garuda which is connected with human life. In Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa, Garuda is connected to the history of the foundation of the State of Kedah during the time of King Solomon. In this tale there is the story of the Prince of Rome who is on the way to marry a Princess of China.

The moral of this tale is the fact that there exists a feeling of a wild desire on the part of the Garuda to destroy other beings. Another lesson learnt from this is finality, God disposes what he pleases.

The Garuda is shown to have ill intention in trying to deter a marriage between two human individuals and to waste their time. The Garuda flies to China and brought the Chinese Princess to Langkawi. Then it attacked the fleet of the Prince of Rome on the way to China at sea.

In the Garuda tales there exists a number of other animals, human characters and notables. The animals are Rajawali, the Eagle and Jentayu, a bird the size as Garuda. Other human characters are Merong Mahawangsa, the Prince of Rome and the Princess of China. Other notables include the Emperor of Rome, the Emperor of China and King Solomon.

Garuda is a symbolic being who has qualities and attitudes which are detrimental such as jealousy, envy, ill-feeling against another being, pride, cruelty and unkind. The Garuda is jealous of the proposed matrimony of the Prince of Rome to the Princess of China. It plans and executes several moves to disrupt the union.

Garuda met with King Solomon to ask the permission to destroy the Prince of Rome's fleet. The Garuda is conceited and promises to prevent the marriage and swears it would leave this world if it is unsuccessful.

This tale of Garuda has a moral lesson : such as said by King Solomon that humans cannot go against the will of God and we must believe that matrimony is made in heaven.

The Garuda is evidently a being who needs no advice. It attacks the Roman fleet a number of times.

The characteristic pride and conceit on the part of the Garuda, result in its failure to destroy the Prince and Princess. Garuda is ashamed of its evil deeds. The Prince of Rome finally weds his Princess of China in the Garuda's palace and both of them once slept in the wings of the Garuda itself.

The Garuda becomes the talk of the public due to its own miscalculation. It is ashamed of its deeds and admits its errors. It feels responsible for its misdeeds and is willing to face punishment by King Solomon. It is willing to leave this world and lives in the Sea of Kalzum. It realises its fall is the result of its own conceit to go against the will of God.

In the field of management, the negative characteristics of the Garuda must be eradicated. On the other hand the characteristics of patience, pleasantness, determination, willingness to sacrifice, the spirit of giving advice that are shown to be the good characteristics of King Solomon, the Emperor of Rome, the Princess of China, Merong Mahawangsa and others are more exemplary for the success of an organisation.

The tale of the White Crocodile teaches us to be loyal and teaches us about love and sacrifice, disappointment and about social status. The tale begins with a palace maid who is well liked by the Queen. Telani by name has charming looks and has a life partner. She falls in love with Telanai, the son of the Prime Minister. As a warrior, Telanai is also

well liked by the King. Telanai also likes to have Telani as his wife, but their intention is marred by questions of social status. Telani as a palace maid is not of the same status as the son of a prime minister.

For this reason of inequality in status in life the loving pair has to meet in secret. They commit adultery resulting in Telani being pregnant. During the absence of Telanai, Telani is banished from main island Langkawi to Pulau Dayang Bunting (the island of pregnant maiden), so named to this day.

The tales of the White Crocodile and of Garuda manifest themselves of both positive and negative values. In the tale of the White Crocodile, it is shown how Telani sacrifices her body and soul for the sake of her lover notwithstanding he is of different social status. Telanai is also willing to sacrifice his freedom in order to be able to live together with his lover. Their love-child has turned into a white crocodile in the Lake of Pregnant Maiden (Tasik Dayang Bunting).

Telanai and Telani are eternally cursed by Gedembai into stone as evidence of the love-bond between two very loyal beings but who fail in their love due to status restrictions practised by the society.



### CHAPTER THREE : THE CAVE LEGENDS

## Gua Langsuir (CAVE OF THE SIRENS)

**T**HERE is a famous cave on the island of Pulau Dayang Bunting with a chilling name. It is called Gua Langsuir which means "Cave of the Sirens". The cave is situated among the rocks slightly higher than the sea level. The cave is a frightful sight as one looks at it from the sea. It is not a big cave. It is carved inside a rock hill not far from the sea. Any traveller passing in a boat would not fail to look at the cave with awe, expecting some frightful thing would emerge from its mouth.

Unlike other caves of Langkawi, there are no formations of stalactites and stalagmites in this cave. The interior of the cave is permeated with a strong pungent smell coming from heaps of old guano. There is an eerie atmosphere around the cave. It consists of two chambers, one on the top of the other. As one enters the cave, one comes to a chamber. From this cham-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

ber, one can see another chamber located slightly down at the end of a narrow, dark tunnel.

The way into the entrance are strewn with sharp pointed stones and pebbles. In front of the cave, there are several cliffs overlooking the narrow sea channel which lies between Pulau Dayang Bunting and the main island of Langkawi. In between these two big islands, there are a number of small islands, Pulau Jerkom Besar, Pulau Jerkom Kecil, Pulau Singa Besar, Pulau Singa Kecil and Pulau Lalang. Fishermen from the main island wanting to go out to the open sea have a choice of going out through this straits or through the left route from Kuah which leads to the mainland through Kuala Perlis or Kuala Kedah.

The front of the cave is now overgrown with shrubs hiding the dangerous sharp stones. The shrubs are not very high as only certain types of low shrubs can grow on the cracks of the hard rocks. They depend only on bird and bat droppings as their manure and also the rain and the saltish sprays of the sea to nourish them. It is a wonder how these shrubs can grow at all on those hard rocks. Without sufficient earth they must have taken a very long time to reach their present height. With the shrubs in front, only the upper part of the mouth of the cave can be seen from the beach. The lower part is hidden by these shrubs. Some shrubs also grow on the rock which formed the steep walls of the cave. Among them, one can see a number of beautiful orchids.

According to the story, long ago, there lived in this cave three Sirens. They would perch themselves on one of the cliffs in front of the cave overlooking the sea. They took the form of

#### GUA LANGSUIR (CAVE OF THE SIRENS)

the most beautiful women. They would sing and behave in a provocative way whenever sailors or fishermen passed in their boats along the narrow straits in front of them. Male travellers would be so enchanted by their songs and their striking beauty that they would lose control of themselves. They would be smitten with a sudden lust for these women. They would jump into the roaring sea and swim towards the Sirens in order to be with them. They hoped to enjoy moments of bliss and ecstasy with them. The sea was at times rough and in their stupor and daze some of these men were drowned. Those who succeeded in going up to the cliff to be with the Sirens would be tortured until they died a slow and painful death and later to be devoured by the Sirens.

These beautiful women were the Sirens of Langkawi. The cave where they lived bore their name, Gua Langsuir, until this day. *Langsuir* were female demons. In their original form, they were hideous looking creatures with indescribable features. Even they themselves hate their own appearance. So they transformed themselves into beautiful women with long flowing golden tresses with a figure of a Greek goddess, bosomy chest and a singing voice of the best opera soprano. They were, however, evil to the very bone. Their amusement was watching men, irresistably drawn to them by their singing and beauty, like insects to the fire. They loved to eat the raw flesh of these men and drink their blood. This was the time when Langkawi was already inhabited with people, mostly fishermen.

It was said that there was a certain magic in their song. It possessed a strong enticing power. Men who heard the song

#### GUA LANGSUIR (CAVE OF THE SIRENS)

and saw their striking beauty, would be so captivated and enthralled that they lost their senses and self control. It was said that even though these people knew of the impending danger, but once they heard the song, they would, nevertheless, be captivated by it that they would entirely forget about the danger. Most of them who perished at the foot of the cliff did not realise the danger when they swam towards these women.

The Sirens loved to sing. They sang all the time. They were very proud of their prowess in singing. They sang in a long wailing voice. It was not a love song. There was no prose in the song. It was a long, shrill, wailing sound like that of the sound of the violin played at a high note. The sound has become so infamous that, in the English language, the word "siren" came to mean any noise that gave a shrill, long, wailing sound. In the time of war, in an air raid, one would run to hide in a shelter whenever a siren was sounded. In a factory when the siren is sounded, it signifies the start or the finish of the work. Ships, ambulance and trains would sound a siren. Whenever a siren is heard, it warns of an impending danger and that the people had to be on the lookout and if necessary, flee for their lives. Most probably, the name for these sounds originated from the singing of a siren.

Some translated the word *langsuir* into "banshee". A banshee is, according to Oxford dictionary, a female spirit whose wail outside a house portends death within the house. The meaning of *langsuir* in Kamus Dewan means a female spirit with a hole in her back who likes to wail and disturb pregnant women. Another female spirit in the Malay world is *puntianak*, which

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

was a female spirit who likes to drink human blood, particularly the blood of women giving birth.

Some people said that *puntianak* and *langsuir* were the same demon. Others, however, said they were different. A *langsuir* liked to wail and sing and depended on both her beauty and song to seduce men. A *puntianak* did not sing, but depended only on her beauty to attract men. A *puntianak* waits for her victims along a lonely road or on the brink of a jungle in the form of a very beautiful woman. Any man who is foolish enough to be lured by her would soon die an untimely death and be devoured by her. So beware, if you see a beautiful woman at an unlikely place and at an unearthly hour, do not approach her, for she may be a *puntianak*. No beautiful woman would be at such a place alone at an ungodly hour.

Whenever a woman gave birth, the blood would drip from the stilt house down to the ground. A man of the house would cover the blood with thorns. The intention was, to prevent the *puntianak* from drinking the blood. It was believed that the *puntianak* whenever she drank blood, had to do so in her original form and not in the form of a beautiful woman. Her original form was an ugly human face with hair dishevelled and her intestines protruding out without a body or legs. When she flew, her intestines would be hanging down like the tails of a kite. So whenever thorns were placed to cover the blood, she dared not drink the blood for fear the thorns pricking her intestines.

In the early 1700s, Europe too was gripped with the legend of demons that drank human blood. A whisper of the word "vampire" was enough to scare anyone in those days. A vam-

#### GUA LANGSUIR (CAVE OF THE SIRENS)

pire was believed to be a male, although of late, female vampires also appeared in cinema films. Originally, a vampire was referred to as a creature that rose from his burial place at night, sometimes in the form of a bat, in order to suck human blood. By daybreak it must return to its grave. It was originally a Slavic and Hungarian legend.

In Europe the story was so widespread that in 1897, a British author, Bram Stoker, wrote the novel *Dracula* and it became an instant literary success. Various plays and films were made on the theme. The vampire as depicted in the plays or films soon became the typical modern vampire. This vampire was shown to have a human form with pale, thin, cold face, staring eyes and protruding incisors. The hair was shiny black, unparted and combed backwards. He wore a dark suit with a flowing black robe on his back and a black bow tied on winged collars. The dress was some sort of a uniform for him. He was able to fly like a bird. At daybreak, he would fly back to his coffin and would lie there with his full uniform on. He would bite his victim on the neck and suck the blood from there. His victims would in turn become vampires after death.

The appropriate translation of *langsuir* appears to be "Sirens". This is because the Langkawi story is something like the famous Homer's epic, *Odysseus*, of the Greek mythology. The wailing temptresses in the Greek story were called Three Sirens. In the story, *Odysseus* had to confront these Sirens, said to be with the head and bust of a woman and the body of a bird. They were also described as women with tails of a fish. They played a lyre or a double flute when they sang. They lived in Cape Pelorus, in the Island of Anthemusa and also on the

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

island that bore their name, the "Siren Island". They also sang wailing songs. Passing sailors were so captivated by the songs that they forgot themselves and jumped into the sea to be with them. The sailors would either drown in the rough sea or, if any of them survived and reached the shore they would be devoured by the Sirens. Human bones could be seen strewn on the shore.

Odysseus and his men managed to escape the perils of the sirens by plugging their ears with wax. Odysseus wishing to hear their songs, did not have his ears plugged. Instead he had himself tied to the mast with a strict instruction that no one was to release him during the singing by the Sirens. When he heard the singing, as his ship was passing through the straits, he was bewitched by it. He struggled to set himself free in order to be with the Sirens. But fortunately he was not able to untie himself. So he and his crew escaped.

In another similar story from the Greeks was the story of the Argonauts. When Jason and his men sailed past the Siren Island, the Sirens tried as usual to exert their power of seduction by their singing. Only one person jumped overboard to join the wicked Sirens. The rest of the crew were prevented from jumping by the superior music by Orpheus who played on his lyre and sang. His music was so powerful that the men in the ship Argo were more fascinated by his music than the singing of the Sirens. Orpheus was a Greek legendary hero endowed with superhuman musical skill. The Sirens, so sad on being beaten, lost all desire to live and were changed into rocks by the Gods.

#### GUALANGSUIR (CAVE OF THE SIRENS)

But the Sirens in Homer's epics were not described as beautiful. Their method of seduction was only through their singing which cast a spell on the intended victims. The Langkawi Sirens were beautiful women. It was their beauty and their song that made men jump to their death. The straits ran near the cave, and the Sirens would sit themselves on a high rock in human form in the clear view of the traveller. From a boat that passed in front, the Langkawi Sirens looked as beautiful as a fairy.

Soon the people of Langkawi came to know of the danger. They kept themselves away from the cave. They went out to sea using the alternative route on the opposite side of the cave. There were two small islands, Pulau Lalang and Pulau Keder, opposite the cave. A boat passing along the other side of these islands would be completely hidden from the cave. Soon the Sirens did not get enough victims to keep themselves happy. They were getting bored.

One day, a fisherman who happened to be both deaf and short-sighted rowed out in his small boat to the sea in front of the cave. He was fishing, using bamboo rods and lines. He was getting a lot of fish from the area. This was to be expected because no fishermen would fish in the area before. The Sirens were overjoyed. They thought at last they were getting a victim. So as usual they sat on the rock and started singing.

The fishermen paid no attention to the Sirens. Being deaf and short-sighted, he could not hear their song and could not see their beauty as they perched on the cliffs. He continued to fish and drew up fishes into his boat as he caught them on his



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

hook. He appeared to be oblivious to the antics of the Sirens and even their very presence. The Sirens were surprised. They had never had such an experience. To their way of thinking, no human could repulse their charm. They became utterly disappointed. They thought they had lost all their power to charm humans.

Fear gripped them. What would happen if a man could come up to them to the cliff and ravished them? They no longer had any power to paralyse them. What would happen if the wives or the relatives of their victims, knowing that they had lost all power, came up to them to take revenge? In their fear and confusion, they flew away from the cave never to return. They have, however, left an indelible mark on the cave. It was named after them. Their notoriety had become the talk of the island until this day.

The men of Langkawi did not know who saved them. They did not know what made the Sirens flee from the cave. Even the deaf and short-sighted fisherman hero who successfully managed to get rid of the Sirens, was not aware of his own meritorious services to the people of Langkawi. He was happy to go back to the same place to fish because he caught a lot of fish there. As a result of his heroic deed, unintentional though it was, some men of Langkawi were saved from an untimely and horrible death.

# Gua Bukit Putih

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(CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

**I**t was said that the highest mountain, Gunung Raya was originally a human being. That human's full name was Ahmad bin Yahaya, Mat Raya for short. During his fight against Mat Cincang, both he and Mat Cincang were turned by Gedembai into mountains, one called Gunung Raya and the other, Gunung Cincang. Every visitor to Langkawi will look at Gunung Raya with admiration. Its beauty and majestic appearance are fascinating. This was because the originator of the mountain, Mat Raya, was handsome and tall when he was still a human. Gunung Cincang was, however, jagged with uneven top, as if he was still angry with his old friend, Mat Raya. Mat Cincang was, during his human days, short and stout, but solidly built. He could not be said to be handsome.

Not many people knew about the life of Mat Cincang during his human days, except that he was a *silat* or Malay

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

self-defence instructor. He was also known to have a violent temper that eventually wrecked his life and also that of his friend, Mat Raya. Mat Cincang was best known to be the father of an exceptionally beautiful daughter, Melor who was the belle of the village.

The story of Mat Raya during his human days was, however, more eventful. Mat Raya was an upright young paddy planter. His thick and shining black hair curled down from his head on application of coconut oil. Whenever he wore a head-gear, the hair would spread out evenly on his shoulders. Behind his small moustache was a sweet smile that showed a row of fine teeth. It was not surprising that many girls fell for him and any of them would be too glad to be chosen to be his bride. Some even said that many young married women while in the company of their husbands would look out from their windows if they heard that Mat Raya was passing by.

As a responsible person, Mat Raya was determined not to marry until he could earn a decent living in order to support a wife. He did not wish to be a burden to anyone if he were to marry without a sufficient income of his own. The paddy land that was left to him by his deceased father was too small to eke out a decent living for a family. He had to work hard and save so that he could buy some more land. He knew some of his friends chose girls from rich families and lived an easy life. But Mat Raya would have none of this.

Mat Raya was however, somewhat bow-legged. But this did not affect much his handsome look. Being bow-legged, he

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

was a fast runner. They said, he could outrun a wild stag. Whenever there was any sports competition held on the island, he would win every running event. His stout friend, Mat Cincang would win every weightlifting event.

As most men in the island, one could only either be a paddy planter or a fisherman or one could be both. There was no other job or profession. Mat Raya was a descendant of paddy planters. His father was a paddy planter and so was his grandfather and great-grandfather. Some paddy planters would also go to the sea during the period of waiting for their paddy to ripen. They became some sort of part-time fishermen or part-time paddy planters.

But Mat Raya only concentrated on paddy planting. He considered paddy planting to be a full-time job. He thought that a paddy planter, while waiting for the paddy to ripe, should look after his growing paddy so that it would not be attacked by wild boars and birds. The plants should get enough water and manured during their early days and there should be no water as they were ripening. A part-time paddy planter was not able to do this.

Mat's father left him many pieces of land. Paddy lands were in abundance then as the population was small. The lands were distributed among his brothers and sisters. His share was a piece of three hectares of paddy land in Kisap not far away from the sea. It fell on him as the eldest son the responsibility to distribute his father's estate and to support his aged mother. He was also responsible to look after his younger brothers and sisters until they grew up.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Mat Raya tilled his land, manured it and planted it with good clone paddy, *Padi Haji Harun*. This clone was said to be the best paddy during those days, although it took longer time to ripen. Since he cultivated a single cropping in a year, he did not mind waiting a little longer for his paddy to ripen. It was worth the wait since *Padi Haji Harun* was considered to produce the tastiest rice and fetched a higher price in the market.

Mat Raya worked hard on his paddy land. As a result his paddy plants grew well. He built for himself a small hut in the middle of his land where he could take a rest after a hard day's work. When the paddy was ripening he made scarecrows to scare away birds that came to eat the paddy. He also made a sling from a piece of bamboo. At both ends he attached a soft rattan and turned it into an instrument like a bow. Instead of using an arrow to shoot, he used stones. He shot at the birds that were not scared of the scarecrows.

For the first two years Mat reaped a good harvest. He sold the paddy and bought clothes and food for his mother, brothers and sisters. Whatever excess money that he had left, he saved it. He did this by keeping it in a hollow bamboo. He cut a small hole at one end of the bamboo and dropped the coins inside. If one bamboo was full, he would make another. His mother knew about his good habit. She was very happy because she always reminded him to save money. She said, he would lead a happy life if he could save one cent a month. But he would be in trouble if he were to overspend even one cent a month. She also told him to save money if he wanted to marry, because no parents would give him their daughter for free.

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

For the third year, Mat Raya was not as lucky as he was before. Ill-luck struck him. As his paddy was ripening, one night a group of wild boars, led by a white sow, came down into his land and ate up almost a quarter of his paddy. Mat Raya was angry when he came down to his land and saw the damage the following morning. From their paw prints on the ground, he knew it was the work of wild boars. So that night, he did not go home. He waited in his shed for the boars to come, armed with a sharp spear. He kept himself awake.

At dawn, he saw the wild boars. He also saw a white sow in their midst. It appeared to him that the boars were being led by this white sow. The boars began to eat the paddy seeds in one part of the land. Mat Raya seized hold of his spear and rushed to the white sow. He stabbed her with the spear again and again. But, to his surprise, the spear could not penetrate the sow's flesh. Then he stabbed other boars. The boars stabbed fell bleeding and soon they were all dead. The white sow on seeing many of her followers killed, gave signal to them to run away. So they raced away out of the paddy field into the night, leaving Mat Raya behind raging with anger. He was also amazed as how the white sow could not be wounded by his spear. That night he slept in his paddy shed.

After a good sleep, he got up with the intention of burying the dead bodies of the boars that he killed. To his amazement, he could not see any of the dead bodies. It was as if they had disappeared into the thin air. That night after having dinner with his mother at his house, he came to his paddy shed to keep watch again. This time he armed himself with a sword that he

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

sharpened until it was razor sharp. He waited for the boars to come. He did not feel any fear for them, because he thought, they could not harm him. If they could they would have done so the previous night. In fact, they ran away from him. They did not come that night.

On the third night Mat Raya waited again. This time after the moon had slid down behind the hills, the boars struck again and in bigger number than before. Mat Raya killed many of them and again he tried to kill the white sow. Again the sword could not wound her. Again, the sow on seeing many of her followers killed, ran out of the paddy field, followed by the other boars. At the same time they trampled Mat Raya's paddy, and as a result a lot was damaged. The boars all raced into the nearby jungle and soon disappeared in the darkness.

Mat Raya was angry and disappointed. Most of his paddy plants were damaged. He knew if he killed the white sow, the leader, the boars might not come again. Being tired, he slept well that night. The following morning he found that all the dead bodies of the boars were no longer in his paddy field. He straightened his fallen paddy plants, so that they could grow straight again. He then went home to have his breakfast, all the time thinking as to what he should do to avert the damage.

After finishing his breakfast, he went to see his *silat* guru who taught him the art of self-defence and who was also a great medicine man. He told his teacher the trouble that he was in. The teacher told him that there were some people or even animals that possessed certain supernatural powers. They could

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

not be wounded with an ordinary weapon made from iron or steel. But they could be wounded with a weapon made of gold. He then gave Mat Raya a spear with its blade made of gold. He also gave instructions to Mat Raya that he should first stab the earth before stabbing the white sow and if the earth gave way to the blade, then it was a sign that the blade could penetrate the victim's body. He also told his pupil that he should return the spear after he had finished using it. Mat Raya accepted the spear and thanked him.

That night Mat Raya waited again in his shed for the boars. He did not sleep the whole night. But not a single boar appeared. Undaunted, the following night he again waited with the golden spear by his side. Then as soon as the moon began to slide down behind the island, he saw them coming. There were a lot more than before. He wondered from where they came, since he had killed many. Seized with rage, he snatched the golden spear and went straight for their leader, the white sow. He did not want to kill other boars this time as they could be alive again.

The white sow saw him racing towards her. She also saw the golden blade of the spear in his hand as it shone in the dim moonlight. She knew she was in danger as the golden blade could penetrate her body. So she turned back and ran towards the jungle as fast as she could, followed by the other boars. She, however, did not expect Mat Raya to be able to catch up with her because she knew, no human could outrun a wild boar. She, however, did not take into account Mat Raya's unusual ability to run faster than a stag.



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Mat Raya could easily overtake her. After stabbing the earth a few times, he found that he could make holes in the ground. He then knew he could wound the sow. He gave her a stab on her chest. But as the sow was running, the blow landed on her right hind leg. The golden blade penetrated into the leg. She kept on running. Mat Raya pulled out the spear, intending to give her another stab. But to his surprise the golden blade came loose from the handle and remained in the right hind leg of the sow. He then stopped chasing. The sow soon disappeared into the woods near the Gua Bukit Putih, (Cave of the White Hill), followed by her followers.

Mat Raya cursed his luck. Now he was without a weapon against the hoard of wild boars that ran past him to join their leader. Had they attacked him, he would be defenceless. But they did not do so. They just ran past him, leaving him standing there. He went back to his shed. He took out his sword and waited, fearing that the wild boars would come out and attack his paddy again. But they did not come.

The following morning Mat Raya went to his guru and sadly told him what had happened and that he could not return the spear. He also could not pay the guru for the gold blade because he did not have that much money. The kind guru asked him to forget about it, because what had happened was not his mistake. The guru, however, remarked that it was strange that the blade could come loose of the handle as it was firmly fitted. Mat Raya then went home, still sad for having lost a very precious weapon belonging to his guru.

## THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

On the following nights no wild boars came to attack his paddy crops, although he waited for them armed with his sword. He was relieved. He thought, since he had wounded their leader, they dared not come out again. It crossed his mind that their leader, the white sow might be dead. He repaired the damage done to his crops as much as he could. He also was quite happy because the damaged crops, after having put them into standing position could continue to grow.

A few days later as he was in his house with his mother, he heard the continuous sound of a gong. He went to the window and looked out. What he saw was some sort of procession. Two men were carrying a brass gong tied to a pole. One man in front and the other behind each carrying one end of the pole on his shoulder. There was a third man walking by the side of the gong, beating it as they walked. There were two other men, better dressed, following the other three. They all looked like officials from the court of a sultan. These two persons took turns to cry out a message. One of them called out for a *bomoh* to go to the palace to cure a princess who was sick. He further cried out that if the princess was cured, a big reward would be given to the *bomoh* who cured her. He also shouted that the palace was in the Cave of the White Hill. A *bomoh* is a village medicine man. Soon the procession passed.

Mat Raya saw his mother sitting on the steps of their front door. She was listening attentively to what was said. He went up to her and asked her whether she knew that there was a palace in the Cave of the White Hill. His mother shook her head and said that she never heard of one and never saw a princess or any court official at any time before in Langkawi. The sultan

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

lived on the mainland, not on the island. She could only guess that a princess with her entourage came to Langkawi to play and then fell sick. But there could not be a palace in the Cave of the White Hill. Why would they stay in the cave instead of outside where there were people? she asked. Mat Raya nodded in agreement. He too could not help wondering. After taking his lunch he dismissed the incident out of his mind and went to his paddy land to work.

A few days later while he was in front of his house, he met three *bomoh* who said they had gone to the Cave of the White Hill to cure the princess. They went because of the big reward promised to anyone who was successful. They said that none of them could cure her although they tried hard using all their skills. Mat Raya asked them whether there was really a palace inside the cave. They confirmed that there was a very big palace there, complete with carpets, chandeliers, manservants, maidservants and guards inside. The furniture there were expensive and exquisite befitting a palace. They also said that the princess was beautiful and she treated them kindly. Mat Raya's curiosity was again aroused. He wanted to go and see, but he feared he would not be admitted inside because he was not a *bomoh*. He then decided to seek the advice of his guru.

A few moments later, while he was still in front of his house, he saw the same court officials again. The officials at the back kept on crying the same words as before but added this time that if the person who could cure the princess was a man, she would marry him and if she was a woman, she would be rewarded with ten catties of gold. Mat Raya's curiosity rose higher.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

He at once set out to his guru's house and related to him what the *bomoh* told him. The guru was silent for a moment. He then told Mat Raya that he had also heard the story about the palace and the princess. But he could not believe it and thought that someone was playing a joke. He said it was strange that the court officials did not come anywhere near his house. Instead they went to Mat Raya's home twice. Mat Raya then said he wanted to go into the cave to find out for himself and asked his guru how to do it.

The guru agreed that Mat Raya should go and see the princess and report back to him. In order to gain entry into the palace as a *bomoh*, he taught Mat Raya a few rudiments of curing the sick. He also told Mat Raya to look confident and talk with conviction that he could cure the princess. This was what all other *bomoh* used to do before they were hired, that was to talk big and exaggerate. It was some sort of the art of salesmanship. If the patient believed that the *bomoh* could cure, this would have a psychological effect that might help the sick person get well. This sometimes happened when the *bomoh*'s curing power failed completely.

So Mat Raya learnt from his guru the rudiments of a few cures. He found that they were not difficult at all. It was just a matter of memorising certain incantations and then reciting them over a jar of water or over a plate of areca nut and *sirih*. *Sirih* leaves came from a plant that some people chewed with gambir and lime. The sick person was usually asked to drink the water or to chew the betel leaves. That was all.

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

The following day, Mat Raya set out for the cave. He was dressed as a *bomoh* – black Malay pocketless trousers, a piece of cloth as a belt, a black Malay *baju* or shirt and a sarong slung loosely across his left shoulder. On his head was a carelessly tied red headgear, not of any particular pattern. Tucked to his waist was a big knife with a wooden sheath with the big wooden handle protruding from the top of his trousers. He carried with him nipah palm leaves cigarettes and some raw tobacco. He chewed some betel nut leaves as he was approaching the cave.

At the mouth of the cave, he met five guards. They seemed to be relieved on seeing him, as if they were waiting for him for a long time. They immediately took him inside. They did not even ask him why he went there or whether he was a *bomoh* or not. He was surprised. He did not inquire either. As he walked in he saw the place was really a palace. It was well lighted with torches at every corner. Beautiful rich carpets laid on the floor. Hanging from the ceiling were expensive chandeliers. There were servants scurrying here and there. The air was chilly and there was a deep silence.

Mat Raya was taken deep into the palace to a special chamber. On a beautiful bed was a girl. An elderly lady who was dressed like a dignitary of the palace came up to him and led him to the girl. She addressed the girl as *Tuan Puteri*, meaning princess. She asked him to cure the princess who appeared to be in great pain. The princess managed to give him a smile. He saw that she was a great beauty. She had black eyes and eyebrows like those of the spurs of a cockerel. There was a big dimple on her left cheek. She had a long hair and it was tucked

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

underneath a piece of silk cloth that covered the upper part of her body. Wrapped around her slim waist down to her ankles was an unsewn batik sarong with a silver belt buckled up. She was lying on a slightly raised wooden bed. He saw that she was dressed in a loose cotton Kedah *baju kurung*, a sort of short blouse.

Mat Raya felt his body trembling as he felt that she had her eyes fixed on him. Then she signalled for him to come near her. He approached her wooden bed and sat cross-legged on the floor by her side. There was a heavy smell of jasmine everywhere. He was still trembling. He asked her softly what she was suffering from. Then she pointed at her right thigh. Mat Raya saw there was a big bulge as if there was something solid underneath the sarong.

Mat Raya was in a quandary. He had to see the naked thigh underneath the sarong. But she was a princess and most probably a virgin. He could not just see the thigh of a princess without offending someone, most probably her parents. The lady court official who was with her saw his predicament. She went up the princess and pushed up her sarong slowly until it reached that part of the thigh where the bulge was. Mat Raya inspected the bulge. To his surprise he saw the skin not broken nor was there a wound. So how did the object enter her thigh? he wondered. But he said nothing. After inspection, Mat Raya gave the signal to the lady to pull down the sarong again.

He then asked for a bowl of water. He recited the verses that he had learnt from his guru. After he had finished, he handed it to the lady and asked her to apply half of it on the thigh of the

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

princess where the bulge was and the other half for the princess to drink. The lady pulled up the sarong of the princess again and applied a portion of the water on the bulge. The princess drank the other portion of the water. Then they all waited to see the result of the medication.

After a short wait they saw there were movements surrounding the area of the thigh of the princess where the bulge was. Then he saw the princess grimacing with pain. She turned right and left trying to stifle a cry. Mat Raya was alarmed at what was happening. He was also afraid that his medication might cause more harm instead of curing. He was afraid he would be in trouble if his medication aggravated the pain. After some time, there was a sound of a thud coming from the thigh of the princess where the bulge was. The bulge suddenly disappeared. The princess stopped tossing around. She appeared to be no longer in pain. The lady official immediately approached the bed, lifted the sarong of the princess up to the thigh. By the side of the thigh where the bulge was, there was a golden spearhead. The lady took the golden blade and handed it to Mat Raya. He examined it and found that it looked exactly like his guru's spearhead which he used to stab a white sow a fortnight ago.

Mat Raya was amazed. To him there were many things that needed explanations. Firstly, how could the spearhead be embedded in the thigh of the princess? Secondly, why there was no tear on the skin at the place of the bulge? Thirdly, why there was not a drop of blood on the spearhead? Fourthly, if the spearhead had come from the flesh of the princess why was there no wound at the flesh where the spearhead had forced

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

itself out? All these questions troubled him. Then suddenly he heard the princess whispering her thanks to him for curing her in a most charming manner.

She got up easily and sat on the bed. She smiled sweetly at him. She again repeated her thanks. To Mat Raya, she was alluringly desirable. Mat Raya slowly raised his head and looked at her. Her striking beauty made him lose all his fear and forget those questions that had troubled his mind earlier. He then handed her the spearhead. She refused to accept it and it appeared to Mat Raya that she was scared of it. She asked Mat Raya to take it as part of a reward for him for curing her. Mat Raya kept the spearhead in the fold of his sarong. She then tied her long hair into a single round bun on the back of her head. She looked more beautiful. Mat Raya trembled as she placed her right arm on his shoulder and asked him to stand.

The princess then said she would marry him as she had promised. If he refused, she said, she would give him a coconut shell full of precious stones. Mat Raya without hesitation, replied that it would be a great honour for him to marry her. The princess smiled and told him to come again in three days' time. She and her maids needed time to prepare for the marriage ceremony. She then took Mat Raya's right hand and led him to the entrance of the cave. They were very close and he could smell her. Oh! What a fragrance it was! For Mat Raya who had never been so close to a young girl before, except his sisters, it was exhilarating. Still holding his hand, the princess walked with him to the mouth of the cave, thanking Mat Raya again and again for curing her.



#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

Mat Raya, who all this while, was lost for words, managed to thank her for consenting to accept him, a lowly person, to be her husband. She replied, it was she who should be grateful to him for saving her life and that his services to her was worth much more than her marriage to him. Mat Raya glowed with delight on hearing her words. At the mouth of the cave they parted. As Mat Raya walked away, he frequently looked back and there she was at the mouth of the cave smiling and waving at him. Soon he lost sight of her. He continued to picture her captivating smile, the dimple on her left cheek, her dark brown eyes and her long black hair as she folded it up to make it into a round bun on her head. He did not want to lose these beautiful pictures from his mind.

Mat Raya went first to his shed in his paddy land. He took the handle of the spear which he kept there and fitted it into the spearhead. Lo and behold! It fitted perfectly. He was amazed. How could the princess be the white sow that he speared that night? He at once set out to the house of his guru and told him everything that took place. The guru did not seem to be surprised. He told Mat Raya that he had an encounter with a *puntianak*.

A *puntianak* was, as the guru explained to him, a she-demon that always took the shape of a beautiful woman. She at first wanted to scare Mat Raya and that was why she came with the other demons in the form of wild boars to destroy his paddy. But unfortunately for her, Mat Raya was not afraid. He did not run away. Instead he managed to fight her by stabbing her with the golden spear. For this reason, Mat Raya was the only person who could cure her. So she took in the form of a beautiful

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

princess and turned the cave into a palace. That was the reason why her accomplices went to Mat Raya's house every time they made the announcement to reward anyone who could cure her. They wanted Mat Raya to go there and cure her. Now they had succeeded.

The guru further explained that a *puntianak* had a hole at the back of her head. Any man who could fill up the hole with a nail could marry her because she could no longer transform herself back into a demon. She would make a good wife, beautiful, faithful and could bear good-looking children. But, said the guru, no one should remove the nail from her head, as she then would become a demon again and would fly away forgetting her husband and children. This was because a demon was devoid of any feelings of love, as otherwise she could not be a demon. That was why, the guru pointed out, the 'princess' hid the hole at the back of the head by making a bun from her hair and placed it on the hole.

Mat Raya was amazed when he heard the explanation from his guru. That was why there was no blood or tear on her skin where the spearhead was embedded. He asked the guru, why she did not harm him or ate him when he was with her? Because, explained the guru, Mat Raya had the gold spearhead with him. A *puntianak* was always afraid of a weapon made from gold. That was the reason why he gave Mat the golden spear to stab the sow because he had suspected that the sow was a *puntianak*.

Mat Raya, still baffled, asked why she had consented to marry anyone who could cure her. The guru asked, how else

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

could she lure Mat Raya to go there? The guru pointed out as Mat Raya did not go there even though she had earlier promised a valuable reward, she changed the reward to that of marriage. When asked why the guru did not warn him about the danger before? The guru said he was not sure she was a *puntianak* since the other three *bomoh* who went there were not harmed. Mat Raya then asked, why these *bomoh* were not harmed? The guru replied that if they were harmed no other *bomoh* would dare to go there including he (Mat Raya). The guru went on to explain, if she was the white sow and having been stabbed by a golden spear, then Mat would be safe because only Mat could cure her and then he would get possession of the spearhead which would protect him.

Asked whether he should go back in three days' time for the marriage, the guru said it was not advisable to go. But if he insisted on going, he asked Mat to carry the golden spearhead in the fold of his sarong for the necessary protection. He advised Mat Raya not to tell any of his relatives about the marriage, as it would never take place. He should go there alone.

Mat then said, if what the guru said was true, then he should have accepted the reward of a coconut-shell full of gems from her. The guru shook his head. He told Mat that a demon would never be truthful to humans. She would always be full of vicious tricks. The gems given to him would be turned into worthless stones when she was not around. Mat Raya thanked his guru for the information and went home. His heart was heavy. He was sad. He could not marry the "princess" if what his guru told him was true. He knew little about demons and ghosts. The only thing that was in his mind now was that the "prin-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

cess" was so beautiful and charming that he could not forget her.

He went home and waited impatiently for three days to pass. In spite of what his guru told him about the *puntianak* demon, he still wanted to go and see her. He hoped that his guru was wrong in this particular instance. To him everything was so real that he could not believe that she was a demon. He could not forget her beautiful face, her smile and her smell. He hoped he could marry her and live happily ever after. He could live in the palace and he would take his mother to live with him. He was elated with the idea.

On the fourth morning, he got up early, took a bath and scrubbed himself clean, trimmed his moustache and oiled his hair. After breakfast with his mother, he put on his best and only Malay dress that he had. He tied his headgear into a warrior type pattern. If he was lucky he would be married to a princess that morning. At the same time he did not want anyone to accompany him fearing that he would be made a laughing stock. To protect himself, he took the golden spearhead and hid it in the fold of his sarong. He also took his old kris and stuck it between his waist and the fold of the sarong.

His mother was watching him all the while. She was curious. She had never seen him behaving in this manner before. She asked him where he was going. Mat Raya suddenly realised that his mother must be curious as to what he was doing. He must find an answer for his mother. He had never lied to his mother before and he would not now lie to her. He could not, however, tell her the whole truth. She would not let him go to

#### GUA BUKIT PUTIH (CAVE OF THE WHITE HILL)

the cave or would ask other relatives to accompany him. So, he told her a half truth, that he wanted to see a girl whom he would like to marry. He knew his mother was keen to see him getting married quickly. He thought this was what was in her mind when she saw him dressed so elegantly. He was right. His mother was only too happy to let him go to see the girl. She told him, if he liked the girl and if her parents had no objection, she would send some elders to arrange for the betrothal. She however grumbled as to why he did not tell her about it before. He replied that he wanted to be certain first before telling her.

So he set out with the blessing of his mother. His heart was thumping with uncertainty and anxiety. He reached the mouth of the cave. He did not meet the guards in front of it as he did before. He entered the cave. It was dark everywhere. Vampire bats were flying noisily, as if they were frightened of his approach. There was no longer the palace that he saw three days ago. There were no sign of maids and servants around. Fear gripped him but he did not want to show it. What his guru told him was true. The princess was indeed a *puntianak* demon. He took out the golden spearhead and held it in his hand to ward off any attack from the demon.

Mat Raya knew that the *puntianak* was somewhere inside the cave watching him because he could smell the same fragrance when she was a "princess" before. The jasmine smell was strong and it pervaded the cave. She might be amused to see him there, dressed in his finest to marry her. She might be smiling somewhere near him, unseen. She might be musing to herself, for here came the bridegroom and the bride was nowhere around. His fear turned into anger. She had cheated him

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

and had destroyed some of his crops. He had cured her for nothing. He thought that if he could harm her before, he could harm her again, if only she showed her face. Yet he should also blame himself. He was so naive. He did not ask even her name and who she was when he came to treat her. He did not ask her how such a big palace could be in the cave. In all his life he had never heard of the palace before. In fact these questions were in his mind before he met her. But he was so captivated by her beauty that he forgot to ask them.

Mat Raya waited for some time at the mouth of the cave where there was some light. She did not appear. So he withdrew slowly cursing her loudly so that she could hear. He reached home and there his mother was waiting for him eagerly at the steps of his house. He told her that the girl was nowhere to be seen and that she no longer wished to marry him. Again he did not tell his mother a lie. It was true. The old lady looked disappointed, but said nothing.

Mat Raya continued to cultivate his paddy land. The wild boars and the white sow no longer came to destroy the crops. Soon he saved enough money to buy another piece of paddy land and later he had saved enough money to marry the prettiest girl in the village. But Mat Raya and his wife were not destined to live happily ever after as Mat Raya was ill-fated. In the prime of his life, he was turned into a mountain, Gunung Raya, by the awful Gedembai during his fight against Mat Cincang. As a consolation, however, he became immortal.

# Gua Cerita

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(CAVE OF STORIES)

**A**t the northern tip of the mainland of Langkawi among the limestone rocks, there is a famous cave, called Gua Cerita or in English, Cave of Stories. There are in fact two caves, one on the top of the other and they both face the emerald Straits of Malacca. They are, however, always referred to as one cave.

The cave faces Pulau Teratau, an island in possession of Thailand. On both sides of the cave is a stretch of beautiful white sand which joins to the famous Tanjung Rhu beach. The island curves in so as to form a bay which acts as a natural protection from the waves to the water inside the bay. The cave is surrounded by small hardy trees which grow in the cracks on the hard hollow rocks above the caves.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

The cave is accessible by boat. After stepping ashore from the boat, you walk a few paces inland on the soft white sand, and you would find yourself in front of the cave. Then you climb a wooden ladder placed there by the District Office to help people go up and see the top cave. While in front of the cave, one can see the breathtaking beauty of the green sea and the bay, inhaling the sea's fresh breeze, invigorating both the mind and body.

Inside the caves, there are beautiful formations of stalactites and stalagmites. One of the pieces looks like a big elephant. There are signs of bats and birds making the cave their home since time immemorial as evidenced by their thick droppings on the floor of the cave. On the walls there are Arabic scriptures, believed to be verses from the Holy Qur'an. These writings hide many stories and intriguing tales.

Historians said when the first batch of Arabs came to Kedah, they stayed there for some time. It was from here that they travelled to Aceh, north of Sumatra, and to the Malay peninsula which lies across on the other side of the island. At that time it was more convenient to travel by boats. These Arab travellers must have made the cave one of their stops to collect water and firewood, before proceeding to their destination. Another version tells us that the earliest ancestor of the Kedah royal family stayed there for a few days after having been shipwrecked.

The rocks in the cave come in various shapes and sizes, resembling a number of furniture items, such as bedsteads, mattresses, candle holders, plates, pots, pans, and other items



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

which were normally found in a home. Some people said these were actual things in the beginning. They must have been people or most probably a family, living there. Some people believed that they were cursed by the Gedembai to become stones. It was also said, that after the Gedembai cursed the family, she, who liked the cave moved in and stayed there.

This was how the cave got its name, Gua Cerita. The cave is associated with the story of an epic fight between Rama and Rawana which was said took place somewhere near this cave. Later there was the fight between the roc against another big bird called Jentayu. In the story of Merong Maha Wangsa, the roc was called Garuda. This fight was also said to have taken place in the sky above the cave. The wedding fleet of the Emperor of Rum was said to have been sunk by Garuda somewhere in the sea near the cave. At that time the fleet was crossing the seas escorting the crown prince to wed the Princess of China. The bridegroom was not drowned in the shipwreck. He was carried by the current to the shore near the cave. He was found by the maids of the Princess of China. They rescued him and hid him in the cave from the Garuda. The Garuda had earlier vowed to King Solomon to prevent the marriage between the crown prince and the princess.

Some people said that the cave was the place where the Garuda hid the Chinese princess and her maids when he brought them to Langkawi from China. But many storytellers disproved this version of the story. They pointed out that the cave was too small for Garuda to go in. In order to make sure the princess did not run away, Garuda would not want to lose sight of her. So he would not have placed her in that cave.

#### GUA CERITA (CAVE OF STORIES)

Some people pointed out since the crown prince was hidden in the cave, the Garuda must have his palace nearby which enabled the princess to visit her betrothed when the roc was away. It must have been therefore near this cave that the Garuda constructed for himself a beautiful palace befitting a great king. To maintain his huge palace, the Garuda captured a number of humans whom he brought to the palace where they toiled day and night as his slaves. If any of them did not work diligently or tried to escape would be punished. The palace had to be always spick-and-span, clean and alluring.

Because the cave unfolded so many stories, it was befitting that it was given the name, Gua Cerita, or the Cave of Stories. The stories are enchanting, told and retold from one generation to another. Some of the events which occurred near or in the cave were stories appearing in the Rama and Rawana of the Hindu epic. The story of Garuda fighting the Jentayu smacked of Hinduism.

Before the people of Kedah embraced Islam, they were Hindus. The religion was brought in from South India. The Hindu Malays built a city around Pengkalan Bujang in the middle of Kedah at the estuary of Merbuk River in about year 848 A.D. They also built a temple there. The remains of the temple can still be seen in Pengkalan Bujang.

Through Hinduism, the Malays came to know about the stories of Rama, Sita, Rawana, Hanuman, and many other stories connected with the religion and the famous Garuda. They even nostalgically connected the stories of Rama, Rawana and Garuda to Langkawi. They continue to tell these stories from

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

those old days until today. Some of their dances, cultural shows and shadow plays also tell us about the stories. It is a wonder, though these stories originated millennium years ago, yet they are still fresh and appear to have been told only a few days ago.

Ask any Langkawi born Malay and he would be able to tell you these stories. No one seemed to get bored with them. On the contrary, they loved to tell them. In the Malay or Thai shadow plays or the *wayang kulit* the story of Rama and Rawana is played again and again. The audience seem to enjoy it even though they had seen the play numerous times before.

## **The Caves Legends**

In this chapter there are stories with caves as background with humans playing its role. The role thus played is important in the field of management. There are three caves having their own legends : Gua Langsuir, Gua Bukit Putih and Gua Cerita. Behind the legends lies teachings of morality and education.

In “Gua Langsuir”, the moral of the story is on how humans are deceived by the beauty and the melodies sound of beings who disguise as women. People are willing to sacrifice by jumping into the sea in order to be with the “langsuir” who appears as a woman. As a result, some are downed and some are abused by the “langsuir” itself.

“Langsuir” is an ugly and cruel creature. They like to see humans in difficulty. Human life is destroyed or the langsuir partake in eating human flesh and drinking their blood. So cunning are they, they transform themselves to be beautiful women in order to cause destruction to human life.

The melodies, they sing are so hunting and entrancing so as to transfix those who pass by their caves. The people know of the danger, yet they are still willing to lose their life so long as they can come to close proximity with the “langsuir”.

There are also many stories about unusual creatures like this “langsuir”. Some people believe that they are like the “pontianak”, the symbol of cruelty and badness. It reflects

a true situation where human beings have bad characteristics that may be destructive to an institution or an organisation.

The story on how the “*langsuir*” transform themselves give the impression on how human beings are often hypocritical in their behaviour. The characteristic human pretence is destructive to an organisation.

The story of “*Gua Bukit Putih*” is a story about one *Mat Raya* who makes an effort to annihilate the enemies of his rice crop which appeared as wild boars. The wild boar is a symbol of gluttony and a degrading character. The wild boar is a transformation of “*pontianak*” who live in a palace in “*Gua Bukit Putih*” (Cave of White Hill).

The secret of the transformation of the “*pontianak*” is out when *Mat Raya* is asked to cure a sick princess at the palace. The transformed wild boar becomes a “*pontianak*” and then becomes a princess – again is symbolic of irresponsible human characteristics who can change their characters at will. So are the characters of irresponsible human beings, permanently associating themselves with sin, extremes and bad deeds.

*Mat Raya* is much influenced by his teacher who is an expert in the observation of changes on behaviour and characters of other humans. In our own life cycle, there are a lot of bad deeds, sins and unethical practices.

In the episodes of “*Gua Cerita*” there surface historical factors on Langkawi. According to history, a large number of Arab travellers and merchants make “*Gua Cerita*” as their

port of call, on their way to Aceh in Northern Sumatra. There are also stories about the ancestors of the royal family of Kedah who stay there in the cave after their vessel is destroyed by a storm.

“Gua Cerita” (Cave of Stories) has a lot of stories about human characteristics. There is also the story of how the Garuda attacks the fleet of the Prince of Rome on his way to China.

There are also stories before the coming of Hindu religion on notable characters such as Rama, Sita, Rawana and Hanuman. These notables carry the symbols of goodness, honesty as opposed to symbols of cruelty and unpleasantness.

So are three stories about caves in Langkawi. “The Cave of Langsuir” is about people who are pretentious, “The Cave of White Hill” (Gua Bukit Putih) is about people who like to change their acts and “The Cave of Stories” (Gua Cerita) tells about human life that is full of danger and ill-luck. All the three caves exemplify how human beings can be exemplary and how they can also just be the opposites. These old tales guide us to follow clean moral ethics and avoid the unethical.

## CHAPTER FOUR : THE HUMAN LEGENDS

# Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak

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**T**he legends of Langkawi cover not only her many islands, but also her mountains. Two of her most famous mountains are Gunung Raya, standing 893.9 metres high and Gunung Cincang merely 696.6 metres high. In the Malay language, *gunung* means a mountain. Ordinarily a mountain is much higher than a hill. But in isolated Langkawi, Gunung Raya and Gunung Cincang are already considered as very high as there are no higher hills there. These "mountains" if they are located in the mainland, would be called hills.

In between Gunung Raya and Gunung Cincang there is a much smaller hill and this one is properly called Bukit Sawak, which means "Sawak Hill". It is called a hill because, most probably, compared to the other two mountains nearby, it is much lower, being only 471 metres high.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

outcome of the fight which might develop to a more serious problem. A Tuesday morning was chosen for the fight. Tuesday was believed by some people to be an unlucky day for anyone to start any work or to set out for a journey. The place of the fight was in a neutral ground, which was a big field between the village and the sandy beach.

On the appointed day, the fight started. Both were without any shirt or *baju*. They wore only trousers with small legs up to the knees which were normally worn by fishermen. Both were clean shaven. Around Mat Raya's head was tied a green cloth to serve as a headgear. It was tightly tied so as to prevent it from falling during the fight. Around Mat Cincang's head was a red cloth. Each used a long thick piece of cloth as a belt in order to keep the trousers up in position. Both were well prepared for the fight.

The fight was a fierce one. Both were equally strong. As gurus of the art of self-defence, they were skilled fighters. There was no sign who would lose. The fight continued for three days. As agreed, they rested after sunset. This meant that they fought the whole day in the blazing heat without stopping to eat and drink. They must be very strong indeed to be able to endure the fight in these trying conditions.

On the fourth day, their disciples, impatient with the outcome, become agitated. They began to fight one another. At first it began among only a few of them. Later the fighting spread, involving all of them on both sides. This was alarming to both masters because this was not what they had bargained



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

for at the beginning. As a result many disciples were hurt and a few were even killed. The disciples were not using fists and kicks but kris, knives and swords. The fighting continued for two more days and there was no sign of it stopping.

The fight attracted many villagers, even those from distant islands. They came in by boats. They flocked to the place of the fight and watched. Instead of trying to stop the fight, they found it enjoyable and many cheered. Some even took bets as to who would win. But at the same time the wives and children of both sides anxiously waited for the fight to stop. Some prayed and some cried. Mat Raya's family consisted of a wife and seven children and a host of cousins, nieces, uncles, and aunts. Mat Cincang too had relatives. Only that he had no wife. His wife had just died, leaving him with only one daughter, Melor. Poor Melor wept all the time when her father was fighting. She knew she had no one to live with if her father were to get killed in the fight.

Mat Sawak tried to pacify both the fighters from fighting. He asked them to be good neighbours again and stop the harm they were causing by their fighting. Being smaller in size he found that this was not an easy thing to do. He had to keep himself safe from their blows and kicks. The two gurus gradually realised the damage they had caused. Eventually they agreed to stop fighting. It was not because they had a change of heart and wanted to be friends again. It was only to stop their disciples from fighting one another. To do this, they themselves had to stop fighting. They then ordered their disciples to stop fighting.

#### MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

So peace reigned again in the small village. Everyone was happy. There was a big celebration to honour the ensuing peace. There was even a friendly match of *silat* between the two schools. Everything went well and after the festivities were over, the former enemies went home. Mat Raya was happy with the peace gained so dearly. He was prepared to put everything behind him. He now realised that nothing good could come out from the fight. Mat Cincang, however, was still not satisfied with the result of the fighting. To him nothing was decided. Even after the fight, Mat Cincang still harboured a deep hatred against Mat Raya.

Fate took a twist in the story. Mat Raya's son, Lading, had fallen in love with the beautiful daughter of Mat Cincang, Melor. He wanted to marry her. Lading told his father about it and said that he would marry no one else except Melor. Mat Raya whilst he had no objection for his son marrying Melor, realised that it was not an easy thing to do. He knew Mat Cincang would not agree to the marriage because he sensed that Mat Cincang had never forgiven him.

Mat Raya knew Melor very well. She had grown up before his very eyes to be as beautiful as a fairy. She possessed all the attributes of a beauty in the Malay perception. She was petite with brown complexion. She had a betel leave shaped face, curly long hair down to her knees. There was a dimple, on her left cheek and her legs were like pregnant paddy stalks and her lips were like a cracked pomegranate. She had a high nose like the sheath of the palm blossom. Her cheeks were as smooth as a sliced mango. Her waist was small like that of a red ant

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

and eyes like the eastern star. Her forehead was like the first night moon, and her eyebrows were like spurs.

Mat Raya wondered how a man as repulsive and ugly as Mat Cincang could sire such a beautiful girl. It might have been that one of her ancestors, far removed, was a great beauty and she took after her. Mat Raya's idea about beauty was that it was not only skin deep. It was not only the surface of the skin that mattered. Beauty must be accompanied with a good heart to make it complete. Mat Raya knew that Melor had a heart of gold. Her beauty therefore was complete. He would be too glad to have such a girl as a daughter-in-law. He knew that Lading had been courting her for a long time and he was proud that his son ended up a winner from among so many other suitors.

It was strange that in Malay stories, good looks of a man were never described in such details as in the case of a woman. Some books merely described the young man as "handsome beyond compare". Most probably the reason was that nearly all storytellers and writers in those days were men. So there was the tendency to pay more tributes to women. They would, however, pay more attention to a man's power and strength and his valour in fights.

In *Hikayat Malim Deman*, the prince's good looks was described after his taking a ceremonial bath, as being so handsome that he eclipsed the beauty of the light of the sun. It went on to describe him as having a good figure and of good character. In another part of the story, it described the hero as merely "very good looking". That was about all regarding the description of the hero. The same book, on the other hand, gave an

#### MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

exalted description of the princess as being so beautiful that if she were to drink water, the shadows of water could be seen running down her throat. If she were to eat betel leaves, the betel leaves could be seen in her throat just like looking through a piece of glass. If she were to lean against a pillar, her beauty could still be seen penetrating the pillar.

Melor was indeed beautiful. She was the heart-throb of every young man in the village. Many had sought for her hand in marriage. However, Mat Cincang was not an easy person to deal with. He only thought of his own happiness instead of that of his daughter. He rejected all proposals of the young men who had sought her hand in marriage. Melor was his only child. He did not want to lose her. It did not strike him that it was his responsibility as a father to find her a good husband who could make her happy and look after her after his death.

Mat Raya turned to Mat Sawak for help. He asked his friend to approach Mat Cincang and to get his agreement for the marriage between Lading and Melor. Mat Sawak had been their mutual friend for a long time. It was Mat Sawak who stopped them from fighting before. He had proved himself to be a very good friend. Mat Sawak in turn was delighted to be asked to be the go-between. He thought that if the children of these two arch enemies were to marry, the relationship between them would improve. He also hoped that peace and friendship between them would be permanent if they could later share common grandchildren.

So one Wednesday night, after dinner, Mat Sawak, taking with him some bamboo shoots as a gift, accompanied by his

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

wife, went to the house of Mat Cincang. Mat Cincang welcomed them and invited them to sit in the main part of his house. Apparently, Mat Cincang was glad to see Mat Sawak. A new white mat was spread out for Mat Sawak and his wife to sit down. Mat Sawak sat cross-legged, his wife sat on her left thigh in a position that the Malays called, *bertimpuh*.

After a cup of coffee and betel leaves, Mat Sawak informed his friend the purpose of his visit. Mat Cincang's earlier joyful face at once turned sour. To Sawak's surprise, Cincang rejected the proposal outright. In fact he was angry. It appeared that he still could not get over the feeling of hatred towards Raya. Apparently, the friendship and respect that he showed towards Raya after the fight was merely superficial. It appeared to Sawak, Cincang hid his feelings so well that no one knew about it. Now it surfaced. Cincang gave a flimsy reason why he did not agree to the proposal. It was because, he said, his daughter was still young to get married.

Sawak realised that it was on account of Mat Cincang's deep hatred towards Mat Raya that their children must marry in order to bridge the dangerous rift between them. Pretending to be ignorant about Cincang's feeling, he implored Cincang to reconsider. He said if Cincang were to reject the proposal, Raya might feel slighted and that they would not be on amicable terms again. Still Cincang refused to reconsider. He could not care less how Raya would feel. He even went on to say that Lading was a bad character and that he had broken many girls' hearts.

Sawak knew this was just an excuse by Cincang not to agree. He personally knew that Lading was a good boy. He was a filial

MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

son of his father and had never caused any trouble in the village. If there were some broken hearts, he could hardly be blamed. He too was endowed with good looks. Sawak personally knew of men, including some old ones, fell head-over-heels in love with some show girls, such as *dikir*, *menora* or *joget* girls who did not even know of the existence of their admirers. Similarly, these girls could hardly be blamed.

Sawak then tried another approach. He told Cincang that if the couple could not marry, they might elope and would go away to stay in another place. They might run to the mainland. This had happened before. If this were to happen, then Cincang would not be able to see his daughter again. Mat Sawak told Cincang that he knew the young couple were head over heels in love with one another. He went on to remind Cincang that girls now were unlike those in the olden days. They knew how to fall in love before marriage and would not accept any husband their parents chose for them.

On hearing this, Cincang was taken aback. He should have thought about this possibility before. He sighed. He knew Melor who, unlike other girls in the village, was at times, not easy to deal with. She had a mind of her own. This was because she always got what she wanted. It was partly his own mistake for allowing her to have her own ways most of the time. He had in fact spoilt her. But then she was his only child.

Mat Cincang was very sore with Melor for carrying out a secret love affair behind his back in spite of his repeated warning to her to steer out of trouble. But he loved her too much to

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

be angry with her. He did not want lose her. For that matter, she could marry any man as long as she stayed with him. He grumbled but eventually agreed to the marriage on two conditions, that Melor consented to the marriage and that after the marriage, the couple would stay in his house. He still hoped that the marriage would not take place because he could not believe that his Melor had fallen in love with Lading. In fact he had never seen them together.

Sawak was happy that Cincang had eventually agreed to the marriage. He told Cincang that he would inform Raya about the conditions and he added that he expected Raya would not have any objections to the conditions. They continued with their conversation on their paddy crops, the catches from the sea and their pet birds. After Sawak and his wife finished drinking coffee, they took leave of their host and went home. They felt highly elated over the success of their mission which they earlier thought was impossible.

The following morning Sawak went to the house of Mat Raya and told him about the good news and the two conditions set by Mat Cincang. Mat Raya being a reasonable person, readily agreed to the terms. He appreciated the reason why Cincang wanted the couple to stay with him. He had only one child. He, Mat Raya, could allow Lading to stay elsewhere because he had six other children. After all they lived in the same village, and they would be seeing one another almost everyday. To him there was nothing to worry about the matter.

After Cincang had ascertained that his daughter agreed to marry Lading, he sent word to Mat Sawak that he consented to

#### MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

the marriage. Mat Sawak in turn relayed the good news to Mat Raya who broke the news to his family. They were all very happy, but the happiest among them all was Lading. He grinned from ear to ear the whole day. A date was fixed for the happy occasion.

Having only one child, Mat Cincang wanted the ceremony of his daughter's marriage to be as grand as possible. All the people in the village and all the neighbouring villages were invited to the wedding. On the morning of the festival, they came bringing with them rice, vegetables, chicken, meat, cakes, and all the necessary ingredients for food as their contribution to the feast. Some even donated buffaloes, cows and chicken. This was the custom of the village Malays in the olden days.

Some neighbours cooked the food and some helped to serve it to the guests. Some organised entertainments, such as shadow play, *dikir* and *makyung*. The last two entertainments were floor show dramas of olden-time kings, queens, princes, and princesses fighting against giants and bad fairies. The shadow show played the story of Rama and Rawana epic.

This mutual help system practised in the Malay village society was called *berderau*. The system had been established in the Malay community in the olden days. They practised this system in planting or harvesting paddy, feasts or clearing cemeteries. Some donated money for the feast. Even to move a stilt house from one site to another, would be done in the *berderau* spirit. The neighbours would come out in hundreds to carry the whole house on their shoulders to a new site. The system was a



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

great help to every person in the village. The cost of the feast was considerably reduced. The feast became something enjoyable instead of sheer hard work.

For the feast, Cincang's students built for him a long shed on wooden stilts with *atap* roof and unpolished plank floor. No windows were built. There was a railing around the shed of about one metre high. The shed was decorated with coconut leaves. This shed was called *balai*. Guests were served food in this shed. At night the shed was used as sleeping place for workers and relatives. This was what took place in Mat Cincang's house on the first and second day of the wedding. Mat Cincang's feast was indeed a very grand affair.

In the compound of Mat Raya's house a similar shed was built by his students. On the third day, after the ceremonies at the house of Mat Cincang were over, there was a *menyambut* ceremony or a welcoming ceremony of the bride to the house of the parents of the bridegroom. Another feast and *bersanding* ceremony took place there.

In Malay weddings, there were two types of *menyambut* or welcoming ceremony; one was *sambut mentah* meaning that on the night of the *bersanding* the groom did not sleep with the bride in the bride's house. This meant the marriage was not yet consummated. The other was *sambut masak* which meant that the groom slept in the bride's house on the night of the *bersanding* and the marriage was consummated. *Mentah* means uncooked or unripe which was the discreet way of saying that the marriage was not yet consummated. *Masak* means cooked

MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

or ripe, also the discreet way to describe that the marriage had been consummated.

In those olden days, the groom and his family would insist that the bride must be a virgin, unless, of course, she was a widow. On the first night, some ladies on the groom's side would place a white cloth on the bed where the bride would be sleeping. The groom would look at the cloth the following morning to see whether there were blood stains on it, after the marriage had been consummated. If there was none, then he would cry foul as he was cheated. This was because the agreement was he was marrying a virgin and not what the Malays called, "nyiur ditebuk tupai" or literally, a coconut which has been bored by a squirrel. This meant that the girl had been deflowered by someone else before the wedding. The groom would then demand back the dowry paid by him and would divorce the girl.

In the wedding between Lading and Melor, Mat Cincang insisted that there would be a "menyambut basah" meaning that on the night of the *bersanding*, Lading had to spend the night in his house. Mat Raya agreed to this arrangement. He knew Mat Cincang too well to argue with him. His only wish was Lading and Melor were happily married and nothing should ruin the occasion. He would put up with anything Mat Cincang wanted in order to achieve this purpose.

On the first night of the feast at the house of Mat Cincang, Mat Raya brought Lading for the *bersanding* ceremony. The groom was escorted by relatives and well-wishers, all dressed in their best. They came accompanied by the deafening sound of drums and shouts, to signify the arrival of the groom. It was

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

this time that a man other than a close relative, that was the groom, would be allowed into the house of the bride without hindrance.

The path leading to the house of Mat Cincang was lighted by torches that shone as bright as daylight. Some torches were made from dried coconut leaves and some from *damak*. The coconut leaves torches, although giving a very bright and big light, would not last long because the dried leaves would burn out too quickly. The ones made from *damak*, a sticky juice from a jungle tree although not so bright, would burn for hours.

Lading was dressed in green Malay wedding costume. The material was from *songket*, a material embroidered with silver coloured threads. The Malay blouse that he wore was called *baju cekak musang* with five rows of buttons. The trousers were without pockets. A matching sarong or *samping* was worn on the top of the blouse from the waist down to just below the knees. A waist band was worn to keep the sarong from sliding down. A kris was tucked to his waist underneath the waist band. On the left of his waist band, there was a cloth flower made from a shiny material. This flower was sewn to the waist band in order to hide the joint of the band. He wore a striking and shiny headgear, slightly tilted to the left, on his head. A golden tiara studded with diamonds was attached to the front of the headgear.

Melor too was dressed in a beautiful wedding costume that matched the costume of the bridegroom. She wore the same shiny material and of the same green colour as that worn by the groom. She wore a *kebaya sarung* with three brooches in the

#### MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

shape of a butterfly which joined the front open flaps of her front blouse. The blouse was worn down long and touched the knees. She wore golden bangles twisted in the shape of a small manila rope on her arms and legs. There were big drooping earrings on the pierced lobes of her ears, and rings on all fingers. She wore two long, thin gold pendants with shining beads attached. They were stuck in her hair, one on each side of her temple. These beads kept on swinging and sparkling as she moved her head, even slightly.

Her make-up for the occasion was made by the professional make-up expert called *mak andam*. This *mak andam* was usually a middle-aged lady reputed to possess charms which enabled her to make anyone look more beautiful. She had done ample justice to enhance the beauty of the bride, which was already beautiful anyway. Melor's lips were crimson red upon chewing betel nuts spiced with lime and gambir. Her raven black hair was anointed with coconut oil and folded at the back of the head in a slanting position or as the Malays called it, *sanggul lintang*. Her eyebrows and eyelids were further blackened by applying a dash of mascara which the Malays called *celak* or eyebrow black powder. The tips of her fingers around the nails and the thumbs and toes were coloured red after having been patched with wet pounded henna leaves the night before. In the middle of her palms and soles were round red marks in the shape of a coin. At the edge of her feet were red lines made by the application of henna leaves. It was believed that painting the nails and toes red with henna leaves would drive away evil spirits. Melor was indeed ravishingly beautiful.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Melor was already on the dais waiting for her man to join her for the *bersanding* ceremony. Lading walked slowly and nervously towards her as he was guided by an elderly relative. He was seated by her right side. Their legs were hanging down from the dais. The *mak andam* adjusted the sitting positions of both the bride and the bridegroom. They sat upright with the heads slightly bent down. Their hands were placed on their laps with palms upwards.

The purpose of the *bersanding* was to let the guests and relatives know that the couple were already husband and wife and they were at liberty to act as such towards one another. Besides, the guests could also enjoy themselves on the occasion. The *mak andam* would stand by the side of the bride and a young man would stand by the side of the groom. They would fan the couple so that the couple would not perspire in their thick clothing. The bridegroom or the bride would occasionally smile as their friends teased them. It was usual and a source of enjoyment in the olden days to tease newlyweds as they sat at *bersanding* position.

Both looked splendid in their wedding costumes. This was what the Malays would say, "Sama elok, sama padan," meaning both were equally beautiful and equally compatible. Sometimes the villagers wishing to describe a well-matched couple, would refer to them as "Seperti pinang dibelah dua," meaning like an areca nut split into two. One half of the nut was as beautiful as the other half. This was because the two halves were from the same nut. An areca nut was always considered beautiful by the Malays.

#### MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

In an island village where people were still sparse, it was a rare occasion to watch a well-organized *bersanding* ceremony. In those days some *bersanding* ceremonies were worth seeing and had become a sort of entertainment. Both the groom and the bride were dressed up in their finest costumes for the occasion. The dais and the backdrops, called *pelamin* in Malay, were beautifully decorated in the finest bright materials. In those days young girls on reaching puberty were kept indoors so as not to be seen. But during a *bersanding* these girls were allowed to come to watch the ceremony. While watching, some would wish that their own wedding would be as grand. At the same time, they would take the opportunity to discreetly watch for eligible bachelors among the men. The bachelors too would seize the opportunity to cast roving eyes to see any beautiful faces around.

The *bersanding* ceremony went on without a hitch. Everyone was happy. Mat Cincang who was always grumpy before, too was seen grinning. The reason was he could see that Melor was happy. After the *bersanding* ceremony, the couple were led to the bridal chamber where there were specially-cooked food had been prepared and laid out for them. Without taking off their costumes, they sat to eat, at the same time eyeing one another shyly, as if they had just met. They did not eat much because before the *bersanding* they had taken the precaution to eat something so that they would not be hungry during the *bersanding*.

After they had eaten, the leftover food was removed. An old lady then handed to Lading a bag of clothes for him to wear for the night and for the following day. Melor's night clothes were already in the room tucked hidden behind some pillows.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

They both silently changed their clothes without uttering any word to one another. They were nervous. Three coconut oil lamps were lighted dimly in the small room. Melor blew out two lamps and moved one to the far end of the room, away from their bed.

The bed was not raised by means of stilts. It was slightly raised from the floor by piling up two mattresses one on top of the other. The pillows were beautifully embroidered with silver threads. Lading locked the door from inside by pushing a latch from one flap of the door into a hole on the other flap. There was a white piece of cloth spread on the bed on the side where Melor would be sleeping. Lading had asked his aunt to do this for him in order to get the necessary proof that Melor was a virgin. They then lay down side by side on the bed.

The feast and the shows went on outside with drums beating and singing continuously into the wee hours of the morning. All were conscious of the fact that the newly-wed couple were spending their first conjugal night together. They knew that they were making too much noise for the couple. But at the same time they knew that the couple would be too preoccupied to care.

Lading woke up early the next morning and inspected the white cloth. He saw dried blood stains in the middle of the cloth. He smiled to himself. He knew all along that Melor was a virgin. He remembered, when courting her before, he could not even hold her hands. He also remembered that she would not talk to him without her friends being around. She was very apprehensive of the village gossip. She told him that her father

MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

had forbidden her from speaking to any man. But she went on speaking to him.

On the nights when Mat Cincang gave *silat* instructions, Lading would secretly spend hours underneath the window, chatting with Melor. Most of the time, he was bitten by mosquitoes. She would not open the door to allow him in. But Lading was already satisfied with this sort of treatment by Melor. As long as he could be talking and looking at her, it was all that he asked for. That was why he was confident that Melor was still a virgin before he married her.

Lading got up. He slid out of the bedroom and went to the well to bathe. At that time all the other people were still sleeping, being too tired because of the previous night's entertainment. After the bath he came back into the room. He saw Melor was already awakened and was preparing his breakfast. They smiled to each other, but said nothing.

Lading then sent a message to his father that everything was "selamat", meaning everything went well. This was the usual prearranged code word that the bride was a virgin. If it were otherwise, the groom's father would not welcome the bride to his home. Mat Raya shuddered at the thought of having to confront Mat Cincang asking for the return of the dowry if Melor was found to be not a virgin.

Mat Raya gave instructions to his men to continue with the preparation for the welcoming ceremony. The arrival of the bride and the bridegroom was expected to be in the afternoon on the following day after they had taken their lunch at the



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

bride's house. This is what the Malays called "menyambut" ceremony or welcoming ceremony. The couple would stay in the groom's house for three nights. After that they would return to the bride's house and stayed there permanently as agreed.

The *menyambut* ceremony at Mat Raya's house went on without a hitch. Another *bersanding* ceremony was held. The feasting went on joyfully. The helpers were cooking and serving food at the same time. As the guests arrived they were served with food. Three bulls were tethered nearby. If there was no more meat left to be cooked, another bull would be slaughtered. Some who had taken the food would leave after thanking the host. The newly-weds were never present during this time because the host was the groom's father and not the couple. The persons who attended the feast were mostly the same guests who attended the feast at the house of Mat Cincang the day before. This was because it was a village feast. The friends of the bride's father were also the friends of the groom's father.

Then at this very happy moment a tragic incident occurred. At that time Mat Raya and Mat Cincang were having a conversation with one another in front of Mat Raya's house. They were happily receiving congratulatory messages from well-wishers with some teasing them that they would soon become *datuk*. This address was given to any male person who became a grandfather. It was not the same class of *datuk* which was a honourable title conferred by the Sultan for any meritorious service.

Casually, Raya said to Cincang, while holding the other's right hand, that he was very glad they were now not only friends

#### MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

but related. He went on to say that this happy occasion would not have materialised had their fight before were not stopped in time. Cincang replied in a rather conceited manner, that if the fight was not stopped, he would have won the fight. Raya was taken aback. He did not expect Cincang to say this. He expected Cincang to say, he would lose. Then Raya in turn would say he would lose. That was the language of noble warriors. Even though he was confident that he could vanquish his opponent, yet modesty and good manners demanded that the remark should be the opponent would win. Raya thought there was nothing to lose by being modest and respectful.

Raya therefore thought that Cincang was joking when he said those words. So he jokingly replied that he would have won because he was bigger. From there a quarrel suddenly erupted and unfortunately a fierce fight ensued between them. It was more vicious than the previous one. It took place near the front stairs leading up into Mat Raya's house where they were both greeting their guests.

At that time some villagers were cooking curry, rice, meat, and vegetables. They all stopped cooking and watched the fight. Mat Sawak rushed to the scene and planted himself in between the fighters and tried to pacify them. But it was of no avail, although Mat Raya tried not to fight, Mat Cincang continued to attack him and he had no alternative but to defend himself. Obviously, in spite of their children having been married to one another, Mat Cincang still harboured a deep hatred against Mat Raya.

Some people believed that human beings in those days were

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

big. So in the course of the fight between Mat Raya and Mat Cincang, a lot of properties were destroyed and trees were uprooted. This time there were no rules for the fight as in the earlier fight. They, however, had to stop fighting after sunset because they could no longer see one another. The next morning they continued fighting. They fought near the big pot of gravy that was being cooked for the feast and the pot for boiling water and the jar containing water. Mat Raya kicked Mat Cincang and the other side-stepped to avoid the kick and the kick landed on the pot containing the boiling curry. Later another kick landed on the hot water pot. Yet another landed on the water jar.

As a result of the force of the kick, the gravy pot was flung to the far end of the island near the sea. The place where the pot with the gravy fell was subsequently called Kuah, meaning gravy. This is how the capital of the island came to be named. The gravy flowed out from the pot and some seeped into the ground. This place came to be called Kisap, meaning being sucked. The pot as a result of the kick broke into small pieces. The pieces landed at a place now called Belanga Pechah, meaning broken pot. The hot water pot fell in a place now called Air Hangat, meaning hot water. The handle of the jar that looked like a ring fell into one of the straits which came to be called Selat Cincin, meaning a ring straits.

The fight raged on for the third day. Both fighters were getting tired but neither would admit defeat. It was a fight to the death. At that fateful time the notorious Gedembai appeared and she watched the fight for a while. After some time she got bored. She then cursed both the fighters to become mountains

#### MAT RAYA, MAT CINCANG AND MAT SAWAK

and Mat Sawak, who was trying to pacify the fighter, to become a hill. So from that day Mat Raya became Gunung Raya or Raya Mountain and Mat Cincang, Gunung Cincang or Cincang Mountain and Mat Sawak became Bukit Sawak or Sawak Hill. There they stood side by side in the middle of the main island where they seemed to be eyeing one another.

The elders of the village continued with the marriage ceremony of Lading and Melor as this was the wish of their parents. The couple lived happily even though at times they woe-fully recollected the cruel and sad fate that fell on their fathers. They had eight children. After every child that was born, they took him or her to the top of both mountains and said, "Father, this is your grandchild." It was not easy to tell their children that both their grandfathers were the very mountains they were standing on. They would not believe it. So it was easier to tell them that their grandfathers were lost at sea. That was the reason why they had no graves.

Some villagers thought that the curse by Gedembai was timely, otherwise a lot more properties would have been damaged. They thought that Gedembai had done a good turn. To them, if the silat gurus were still alive, there would be no peace in the village. They were however, unhappy that Mat Sawak was cursed too. He was an innocent party. He was doing a noble job in trying to stop the fight. They thought he should not have been cursed. But then they thought, Gedembai might not have known that Mat Sawak was there to stop the fight and was not taking part.

The two mountains and the hill are majestic to behold. They rise up from the flat paddy fields into the clouds. At present

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

there is a road leading to the crest of Gunung Raya where a telecommunications transmitting station has been built. Soon the mountains will be developed. It was hoped that one *silat* school will be built there. This was the wish of these two *silat* masters who had given their life to the glory of the art.

Some people thought Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak were lucky in that upon their becoming mountains and hill they have acquired immortality. They will continue to stand there proudly, admired by all the people in the island. They were spared the pains of death. They were not buried in graves and soon to be forgotten like all humans. They can continue to witness the improvements to the island being made by men and women from time to time. At the same time they can also watch human follies and greed which end up in fighting, harming and killing of one another, as they themselves had done.

They can also witness many secrets of men and women and their intrigues that are hatched up from time to time. If only they can tell! But alas, being what they are, they are not able to speak. But as a result of their own experience, Raya and Cincang knew it was foolish to envy one another and most of all to fight one another. Nothing can be gained out of fighting. Perhaps in their case, the pleasure of being turned into mountains was one instance where fighting was rewarded. But not all people who fought could be turned into mountains. Gedembai was no longer around. They feel sad that the story of their follies in fighting one another is being told and retold without ending. These people appear to condemn them for fighting but never pause to consider how lucky they are in having attained immortality.

## **The Human Legends**

This chapter relates the story of three men of Langkawi – Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak. They are victims of Gedembai, the notorious ghost that roamed the island. She was said to possess the power to punish whoever she disliked by casting spells on them, turning them into stones or any other objects she wished. Thus out of spite, Gedembai cursed the three men turning them into two mountains and a hill. Mat Raya and Mat Cincang became mountains – Mount Raya and Mount Cincang, respectively. Mat Sawak was turned into a hill – Sawak Hill. The mountains and hill still exist to this day.

The disaster that befell the three men could also happen to us today. This story should therefore be taken as a lesson to us. Such stories, though considered as myths they portray the way of thinking, behaviour and characteristics of people in those days.

The episode relating Mat Raya has been told in chapter three. He was a good-looking, good-natured and hard working man. He spent his time toiling his padi field in order to support himself and his mother's livelihood. They were contented with life and thankful to God for the bountiful harvests. However, their happiness was short-lived when all of a sudden Mat Raya was faced with a disaster. His crop was destroyed by wild boars and his attempts to chase them out of his padi field failed.

There was an occasion in which the white coloured pigs were transformed into princesses. The princesses turned out to be vampires who caused a lot of sufferings to humans.

In actual fact our own lives are often disturbed by bad elements that can endanger our lives. In this story Mat Raya represented people who like to live in peace and harmony, while the white pigs represented bad elements that were considered disgusting and repugnant.

Mat Cincang, on the other hand, was pictured as a vindictive, self-centred and aggressive person. As a martial art instructor he always tried to find fault with Mat Raya who was also a martial art instructor. As a father Mat Cincang never showed his love to his daughter, Melor. He had rejected several suitors who proposed to marry Melor. Among them was Mat Raya's son, Lading. However, he finally conceded and gave his consent when he was threatened by Lading. Even then he had set a condition that the couple should stay with him after their marriage. Mat Raya avoided any disagreement with Mat Cincang while they discussed arrangement for their children's wedding ceremony because he wanted it to run smoothly. Whereas Mat Cincang could always show his animosity towards Mat Raya.

While Mat Cincang and Mat Raya were not on friendly terms, Mat Sawak came into the picture. As an honest person who did not wish to see rivalry among friends, Mat Sawak

decided to act as a mediator. He persistently tried to bring peace to the community but sadly nobody seemed to appreciate his initiative to avoid differences among the people.

The squabble between Mat Raya and Mat Cincang soon spread to their followers and people from other smaller islands too supported their rivalry. But Mat Sawak would never give up his attempt to stop the quarrel because he firmly believed the feeling of animosity among the people could lead to disaster.

In the end Mat Sawak succeeded in his attempt to bring peace and harmony to Langkawi. He managed to pacify the two warring factions and more importantly he managed to bring together Lading and Melor as husband and wife.

Lading was a symbol of friendly and likeable young man of his time. He was an obedient son who worked hard in order to assure a rewarding future for his family. Melor, his wife too was an example of a kind hearted young woman. Sadly, her father Mat Cincang had never appreciated all the good qualities possessed by her.

The wedding ceremony for Lading and Melor was arranged and celebrated according to age-old tradition. The people cooperated to make it a success.

The story of Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak also relates the origin of place names in Langkawi. The major town which is also the capital of Langkawi District is “Kuah” which means “gravy”. The name was said to originate from an incident in which



Mat Raya and Mat Cincang had a fight. In their effort to throw each other to the ground they crashed into a pot causing the gravy in it to spill out to the ground. There is another place in Langkawi called “Belanga Pecah” meaning “broken earthen-ware pot”. Obviously, the name originated from the same incident.

The second time Mat Raya and Mat Cincang had a fight it lasted for a long time. Even Mat Sawak failed to stop the fighting. It was then that Gedembai became extremely infuriated. She then cast her spell on the three Mats, turning them into two mountains and a hill. Mat Raya was turned into Mount Raya and Mat Cincang became Mount Cincang. The kind-hearted Mat Sawak, however, was turned into a hill known as Sawak Hill. The three victims of Gedembai exist to this day to serve as a reminder to everyone not to cause trouble and disrupt the peace.

Such legends have been handed down from one generation to another to serve as lessons to be learned by everybody. They draw our attention to the fact that conflicts will always end up in dismay and good marriages may bring happiness while misdeeds can cause hardships. All those who are involved in management should take heed of such advice and warning.

## CHAPTER FIVE : THE HISTORICAL LEGENDS

# Makam Ajaib (THE MYSTERIOUS GRAVE)

**I**n the small village of Padang Matsirat, there is an ancient grave. It is not known when the grave was dug or by whom or who was buried there. By the look of its tombstones, which are rather unusual, it must belong to someone important. Usually people in the locality would know who is buried in a grave. In this case, it is said that this grave appeared suddenly there without anyone knowing how. They can only make a guess as to who was buried there. They thought that it was the grave of one Tun Jana Khalib from Pasai who was executed by the King of Singapore in Singapore some time in the year 1200 A.D.

The people in the area looked after the grave very well from the time it appeared. Some came and paid respect to it. Some offered prayers. There were some who asked for help from the person buried there in order to make them healthy or recover from sickness.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Tun Sri Lanang, the famous Malay writer, wrote in the year 1612 A.D. in his book, *The Malay Annals* about this Tun Jana Khatib. The story about this man was pathetic. As stated, he was executed by the King of Singapore for trying to show off his skill as a magician to the queen. He was caught red-handed while performing his act.

According to the story, Tun Jana Khatib was taken to the place of execution. He was stabbed with a spear several times. His body suddenly disappeared and reappeared in Langkawi. This was the reason why the people of Padang Matsirat guessed that the grave at their village which appeared suddenly and without anyone digging it, must be the grave of Tun Jana Khatib. To these people, there was no other explanation as to the existence of this unknown grave. The reason is that since Tun Jana Khatib's body disappeared in Singapore and appeared in Langkawi, so they argued, this grave in Padang Matsirat must be his grave.

The tragic story of Tun Jana Khatib was brief. Tun Jana Khatib, hailed from Pasai, a country in Sumatra. He died rather tragically in Singapura, the original name for Singapore. He was of Arabic descent. His grandfather, together with a few other Arabs, came down from Yemen to trade in the Far East. They came to Pasai in Sumatra. They converted the king of Pasai and the people to Islam.

The Arabs in those old days were highly respected for their religious work. They were bestowed with honours, as could be seen in the title 'Tun' as worn by Jana Khatib. 'Tun' was, and

#### MAKAM AJAIB (THE MYSTERIOUS GRAVE)

still is, a title accorded to only certain distinguished persons in the sultan's court, especially to the children of the 'Bendahara' the prime minister or the children of the 'Bendahari', the minister for finance. In certain Malay states, these male Arabs were even permitted to marry into the royal family.

So as the story goes, Tun Jana Khatib's grandfather married into the royal family of Pasai. He sired nine children; five boys and four girls. One of them was Khatib's father. All were conferred with the title 'Tun' by the sultan. Khatib's father also married into the royal family and Khatib was also bestowed the title with 'Tun'. He was at the age of 22 then but still unmarried, although in those days boys and girls married in their teens. Khatib having a Malay grandmother and mother and living all his life in a Malay community, could not speak fluent Arabic, as his grandfather, except those words and phrases that he had to recite in his prayers. In his wild young days, he did not acquire as much religious knowledge as compared to his father.

Singapura was originally known as Temasik. The country's first ruler, Sang Nila Utama came from Banten with the intention at first to play in the island. He subsequently fell in love with the island. As he walked inland, he saw an animal described in the story, as having red body, black head and white chest, agile and strong. Its size was described to be slightly bigger than a mountain goat. When Sang Nila Utama asked what was the animal called, his prime minister told him it was a *singa*, which was a lion.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Although the animal as described could hardly fit the description of a lion, the island was named by Sang Nila Utama as "Singapura", meaning "Lion City". *Pura* is a Sanskrit word, meaning "city". Sang Nila Utama then decided to make Singapura his home. He thought that it was a good omen for him to see such a strong animal there and that Singapura would subsequently become a strong country. As he was a son of a king and there was no ruler in Singapura at that time, he was crowned king of the island.

Singapura, because of her strategic location, gradually became prosperous. Many traders from far and wide came to trade there and most of them became prosperous. The Western powers in those days too realised the importance of the island and they came by the hordes. When the British came to the island, they renamed it "Singapore" for reasons only known to themselves. Thus, the significance of the name was lost. However, to the Malay world, the island is still fondly known as "Singapura".

Tun Jana Khatib heard of Singapura's prosperity and abundant opportunities to start a profitable trade there. So together with two other merchants, Tun Jana sailed to Temasik with the noble intention of starting a business. At the beginning, he did not know what trade he would carry out. He thought it would be better for him to go there and make an assessment.

Tun Jana Khatib was also a well known magician in Pasai. He had learnt the art from his grandfather during his childhood days. Although he did not do well in his religious studies, he

#### MAKAM AJAIB (THE MYSTERIOUS GRAVE)

excelled as a magician. He spent a lot of time in practising the art until he was almost perfect in performing it. He held a number of successful performances in Pasai. He took pride in his ability to perform the art and was highly thrilled when the audience lavished him with praises.

When he set out to Singapura, it was also his intention to show to the people of the island his ability as a magician. Magic was little known during those days. It was also known to be a dangerous art, because if the performer was not careful, he could be branded as a person associated with the devil. People in those days thought, a magician could only perform those tricky acts with the help of the devil. He might face an instant death sentence from the Bendahara, the prime minister or from the Temenggung who was the minister in charge of security. Apart from the king, these two ministers were vested with the power to impose a death sentence on the people, except on the members of the royal family. Only the king could impose any sentence on any member of the royal family. In the case of Tun Jana, because he was a grandson of their beloved religious leader and had connections with the king through his mother, no one dared to accuse him of associating with the devil.

The name of the Hindu king of Temasik at that time was Paduka Seri Maharaja. He was the grandson of Pikrama Wira and a great grandson of Sang Nila Utama, the founder of the kingdom. Pikrama Wira was reputed to be a great general. With a much smaller army, he was able to defeat the much bigger army of Majapahit which had been sent to conquer Singapura.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Sri Maharaja was a very handsome man. No one in those days could be said to be more handsome than him. According to the story, he had a weakness. He loved to be praised for his looks and for other works that he did, even though they were sometimes not worthy of any credit. At times some praises that were lavished on him were utter flattery. Although the king had this shortcoming, he ruled the country wisely. He was capable of giving good judgement and those who appeared before him for redress usually went home satisfied.

So Singapura continued to prosper and became a big city. The number of merchants that came to trade kept on increasing. The population increased and many people from other countries came to settle down in the island.

Tun Jana Khatib arrived in Singapura with two of his friends. They stayed with a friend, another merchant from Pasai who had established his business in the city. After a night's rest, they started to inspect the city. They saw many ships, big and small in the harbour. They also saw many fine buildings and shops. They saw many kinds of goods and wares in the shops that came from the Middle East, India, China, and many other parts of the world.

On the second day they walked inland. They saw many beautiful houses belonging to the dignitaries of the island. In the middle of these houses, they saw the king's palace. It was a big wooden structure fenced with areca nut trees. The palace had many pillars of the same size which were round in shape. There were many windows all around the building. The doors, the pillars and windows were beautifully carved.

#### MAKAM AJAIB (THE MYSTERIOUS GRAVE)

As they were admiring the beautiful structures, they saw in one of the windows a very beautiful lady looking in their direction. Perhaps she was intrigued by their strange appearance and dress. They wore leather sandals and loose garments that were usually worn by the Arabs and each wore a big turban on the head. This type of dress was never worn by Singapura people.

Tun Jana and his friends had made an unforgivable mistake in wandering into the palace ground. In those old days, a palace ground was a closely guarded place open only to the king or to close royal family members. Other people, even the locals, never dared to go there. Those who wish to seek redresses would have to contact an official of the court first before being taken before the king in one part of the palace called *balai* or hall.

Tun Jana Khatib and his friends did not know about this restriction. They were not given any such warning and so they were at the place where they should not have been. They also did not know that the beautiful lady was the queen of the land. Worse still, Tun Jana Khatib when realising that such a beautiful lady was looking at him, in his boisterous way, tried to show off his magic skill in order to impress the lady. He had no ulterior motive, except to show off.

His friends, sensing they were in a strange place and fearing they might be in danger, urged him to walk out of the palace as quickly as possible. Tun Jana Khatib refused. His friends then quickly walked out of the palace grounds, leaving Tun Jana behind, still intent to show his magic.



#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Tun Jana then commenced his act. He gazed at an areca nut tree in front of him. It was a penetrating gaze with a deep concentration. Lo and behold! In just one moment, the areca nut tree was split into two and it came crashing down to the ground.

Unknown to Tun Jana Khatib, the king was watching him too. The king was very angry. He thought the insolent man was trying to flirt with his queen. He said, "Cursed the man! He knew our queen was watching, he tried to show how clever he was." He ordered his warriors to arrest Tun Jana Khatib and execute him at once. Tun Jana was arrested, much to his surprise as he did not know what wrong he had committed.

The warriors took him to a place of execution. It was in a field near a bakery shop. He was tied to a pole. Three warriors stabbed him a number of times with their spears. His blood flowed out, but to the amazement of the warriors and to those who came to witness the execution, his body suddenly disappeared before their very eyes, leaving only a pool of blood at the place of execution. The owner of the bakery came out and covered the blood with a tin lid in order to prevent flies swarming around it. The blood suddenly hardened and became a piece of red stone.

The body of Tun Jana Khatib, according to the story, magically appeared in Langkawi and was buried there. No one, however, could tell who dug the grave to bury the body. Since there was such a story and the appearance of the unknown grave in Langkawi, the people of Padang Matsirat strongly believed that

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

the unknown grave near their mosque was that of Tun Jana Khatib. This was the only explanation as to the existence of the grave.

The story as to how Tun Jana Khatib's body disappeared and how his blood flowed and subsequently turned into a red stone became a popular topic for conversation in Singapura for a very long time. The people even made up a poem to describe the incident. It ran in Malay as follows:

*Telur itik di Singgora,  
Pandan terletak di Langkahi,  
Darahnya titik di Singapura,  
Badannya terhantar di Langkawi.*

The translation reads as follows:

Duck's eggs in Singgora,  
Pandan leaves in Langkahi,  
His blood flowed in Singapura,  
His body lay in Langkawi.

So if you visit Padang Matsirat, go to the mosque and ask for the grave of Tun Jana Khatib and it will be shown. Say some prayers for his soul, for this was one of the few cases that the king, Sri Maharaja meted out a wrong judgement without investigation. Tun Jana died unjustly for just being playful and not with any intention to flirt with the queen.

# Mahsuri

A visitor to Langkawi will certainly come to hear about the story of Langkawi's most beautiful maid named Mahsuri. He may be taken to visit her grave at Kampung Mawat, Ulu Melaka as part of the itinerary of the tour of the island. He will then be told of the story by the tour guide. The story as told may be so brief that it would not do justice to the whole drama. We can understand why this happens. It is because there are so many other stories to tell about Langkawi. However, to appreciate the story of the maid, one should hear it in full.

The villagers of Langkawi revered the maid. Her story has become some sort of a folklore to these people. Ask any Langkawian, he or she will be able to tell the story. They regarded her a martyr and as an epitome of purity. Her life was cut short as a result of a spate of jealousy and hatred beyond any imagination. She was a helpless girl who had to face the

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

cruelties of life prevailing during her time. She was charged for committing an offence she did not commit. She was not given an opportunity to clear her name. As such the pang of sorrow and anguish were deeply entrenched in the hearts of the islanders to the present day as her story is told and retold. The reason was they all knew that she was cruelly executed for an offence that she did not commit. It was a trumped up charge against her. The villagers at the time of the incident, were sad to witness the stupidity and arrogance of their chieftain who held the power of life and death in the island, and who was devoid of any sense of justice.

Even after her death, Mahsuri was not given a decent burial. The reason was that she was a condemned sinner. Her grave was not in the proper Malay Muslim cemetery, which was always near a mosque. They dragged her dead body and buried her at a spot not very far from her house underneath a *cenderai* (*cendramulia*) tree. No tombstones were planted to mark her grave. But even without the tombstones, her grave was known to everyone on the island. People visited the unmarked grave and offered prayers for her soul. They held feasts and performed religious ceremonies there.

When our first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, was the District Officer in Langkawi during World War I, he had a proper tombstone made and placed on her grave. On the stones were inscribed her name and the names of her parents, Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang. Nearby was a well, now known as 'Mahsuri Well' which was used by her to draw water since she was a child until her death. Today, these places have become popular tourist attractions on the island.

## MAHSURI

The story of Mahsuri is pathetic. She was stabbed to death as a punishment for allegedly committing a heinous crime at that time – adultery. Death was the only punishment in those days for committing adultery. It was her own mother-in-law's evil doing. She was so jealous of her own daughter-in-law that she plotted her death. The mother-in-law, Mahura, was convinced that only her death would stop her husband from longing for her even though at that time Mahsuri was already her very own daughter-in-law and also that of her husband. It was jealousy beyond any reasoning. The story was something like Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs, where the Queen was so intensely jealous of her stepdaughter's beauty which excelled hers that she resorted to all kinds of tricks and witchcraft to exterminate her. In the end she got herself burnt.

On the other hand, Mahsuri's death had made her famous and at the same time destroyed the life of the mother-in-law. Mahsuri's name came to be known far and wide. Immediately after her death, she became a legend. Some villagers even believed that she possessed some supernatural powers. She could cast a spell on the island for punishing her for a crime she did not commit. She became a symbol of impartiality to be quoted as a grim reminder to anyone who dispensed with justice that he should not hear only one side of the story.

Even before her birth, there were some extraordinary stories about her. The following are some of them. One afternoon while her father, Pandak Maya was searching for his lost buffalo in a rice field behind his house, suddenly there was a big storm followed by a heavy rain. Pandak Maya took shelter in

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

an abandoned hut that was used by the owner of the rice field whenever he came to work there. Pandak Maya suddenly heard the sound of a baby crying. He searched for the baby, but could not find it. Instead he found some rice crusts on the floor of the hut. When he lifted up the rice crusts, the cries stopped. When he put them down, the cries started again.

Rice crusts are usually formed at the bottom of a rice pot after the rice had been cooked with firewood. Crusts will not form if the rice is cooked in an electric rice cooker. The bottom part of the rice becomes a hard layer and turned dark red in colour. They are brittle and can easily be broken into pieces. These are rice crusts. Some people love to eat them with a dash of curry on them.

Pandak Maya took the crusts home and showed them to his wife, Mek Andak Alang. She recognised them as *Maya Padi* or the Spirit of Paddy which would bring good luck to any person who found them. That night Mek Andak Alang added a small piece of the crusts into the rice she was cooking. When the rice was cooked, the family ate it. They found the rice to be much more delicious than rice cooked in the ordinary way. They finished the rice and after that they went to bed. On the following nights, Mek Alang Andak cooked the rice in the same manner, that was by adding a piece of the rice crusts into the rice that she was cooking. Soon all the crusts were exhausted. The family found themselves in a better health than before. Not long after that Mek Andak Alang found herself pregnant.

During the pregnancy of Mek Andak Alang, another strange event occurred. One morning as Pandak Maya was

#### MAHSURI

searching for firewood, he came across a cave. He then heard strange sounds coming from inside the cave. He went inside to find out what caused the noise. Once inside he saw lots of birds' nests on the cliffs forming the walls of the cave. He collected these nests and brought them home to his wife, Mek Andak Alang. His wife told him that the nests were a delicacy to the Chinese who relished it. It was boiled into a soup and drank with rice. It was believed that the soup would bring good health to anyone who drank it.

Pandak Maya then sold the nests to some merchants in the town. They in turn sold them to merchants in Penang. They told him they would buy as much nests as he could bring to them. Pandak Maya did. Soon Pandak Maya became rich. When a friend of his, named Mat Jusoh, heard about this, he asked Pandak Maya where he got the nests. Pandak Maya, being a simple man, and not by nature a greedy person, told him. Mat Jusoh then asked Pandak Maya to show him the cave. On the appointed day, both set out for the cave but before reaching the cave there was a storm. It was so big that they had to turn back.

On the following day, they started out for the cave again. Again there was a heavy storm and again they had to turn back. They tried for the third time, but this time Pandak Maya could not find the cave. It just vanished. Pandak Maya could not explain to his friend how this happened. When he told his friend that the cave had vanished, his friend did not believe him and accused him for purposely not wanting to disclose the whereabouts of the cave. Since that day they ceased to be friends. Pandak Maya could no longer find the cave. It was believed

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

that the birds' nests were intended for Pandak Maya alone and should not be shared with others.

Pandak Maya was sad on losing the birds' nests. He lost a source of good income. He thought he should not be punished for being kind-hearted. After losing the birds' nests, he planted vegetables on the plot of land around his house. He knew that he would soon have nothing left of the money out of the sale of the birds' nests. As his vegetables grew, he noticed that they grew exceptionally well. The leaves were lush and they produced chilly, cucumber, peas, and other vegetables in abundance. His chicken and ducks too bred prolifically and soon their number multiplied. The neighbours came to buy from him the vegetable and the fowls. He and his family continued to live a reasonably good life.

After nine months and ten days, Mek Andak Alang gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Pandak Maya was very happy and named her, Mahsuri. Seven days after her birth, Pandak Maya had a dream. He was told to take his daughter to be bathed in a sacred pond not far away from his house. Pandak Maya did what his dream told him to do. After he had finished bathing Mahsuri he saw around the pond a number of pieces of stone-like substances as big as a coconut. He gathered them and took them home to his wife who told him that they were incense. People burned them in order to give a sort of exotic and strong smell in the house while conducting some religious ceremonies. Pandak Alang sold them and he and his family became more prosperous.



## MAHSURI

Some villagers believed the whole story of Mahsuri, including those strange occurrences experienced by her father. They said that they were caused by Mahsuri's supernatural powers. Others, however, discounted these occurrences and believed only those parts which could be supported by logic and reason. They believed that the strange occurrences and mythical parts of the story were added by storytellers from time to time so as to make the story more interesting. It was during those days where all heroes and heroines must possess some supernatural powers in order to defeat the devils and the giants. The story would be dull and not worth listening if it was otherwise.

Those were the days when there were no televisions and radios or even newspapers. Storytellers were a source of entertainment. Even then it was not very often that the villagers could be entertained. Only when there were big wedding feasts that the villagers could see live performances such as *makyung*, *dikir* and *hadrah*. The performances consisted of dancing and singing while a story was being told. A storyteller might also be called to perform. That was why in those days, a wedding feast was very popular. It was a source of entertainment for the whole village.

A storyteller in those old days could earn a comfortable living. His job was just telling stories. He had no overhead expenses. He had no entourage to accompany him. He was in fact a one-man show. There was one type of storyteller called Awang Belanga. Awang was a name, among the Malays, used to refer to a man. Belanga was a cooking pot. Originally he used a cooking pot to beat up a music while telling stories. It was not known

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

why he did not use a drum. Most probably a drum was hard to come by. The cooking pot was to be found in every kitchen. It therefore appears that this storytelling was not intended to be a serious business in the beginning, although gradually it developed into a profitable money-making business.

Awang Belanga soon found out a cooking pot did not give a suitable sound as accompaniment music to his storytelling. Furthermore, the used pot was always dirty. The bottom and side were full of ashes because it was used to cook food by using firewood. Then he progressed to the use of *batil* which was in the shape of a round pot used to keep cold water. It was made from brass which if polished, would shine. *Batil* gave a more piercing and louder sound than a cooking pot. It was more suitable as an accompaniment music for storytelling. Moreover, a *batil* was cleaner and easier to carry about. The brass would be polished to mirror shine and it would sparkle in the hands of the storyteller in the light of the dim kerosene oil lamps in the room. Although the storyteller had changed to using *batil* instead of using *belanga*, this one-man artist continued to be called Awang Belanga and not Awang Batil.

So Awang Belanga went around from village to village to tell stories. He had lots of stories including the Garuda, Ramayana and of course, Langkawi's Gedembai. One popular story in Kedah was the famous Selampit, a story of a legendary hero of Kedah. Awang Belanga usually performed at night after dinner. After he was served with a sumptuous dinner with other guests, the host who hired him would choose one story for him to tell that night. Male adults and children gathered

## MAHSURI

around him. The womenfolk would sit slightly behind. After he had finished telling the story, usually in the wee hours of the morning, the host would give him a place to sleep. He would sleep until midday so that he would be fresh for the performance on the following night. Breakfast would be served after he had a bath at the well near the house. All these were normal facilities given to him as part of the bargain for hiring him.

After the death of Mahsuri, her story became a hot topic. Many people in Langkawi as well as in the mainland of Kedah would ask for her story to be told. In order to draw a big crowd, they would have to make the stories interesting. They would "pad" up a story by adding some supernatural powers in it. For this reason some of the storytellers, even elevated Mahsuri to the title of a princess, although she was just a village lass. Some even alleged that she had white blood flowing in her veins.

But Mahsuri was not a myth, although some people called her story a legend. There was sufficient proof that there was such a person as Mahsuri. But whether she was with or without the supernatural powers was a matter of conjecture and belief. Unfortunately, there was no written version of the story at the time of the incident or within living memory after her death. So many versions appeared. It is now discovered that there are about 14 versions of the story. The stories were handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and vary from one storyteller to another and from time to time. A university graduate earned his PhD by making a research and writing a thesis on her story. Our first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman wrote and directed a film on the story. What is told

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

here is the popular version as told by the Historical Society of Malaysia, Kedah branch, including the mythical and all.

This incident took place in the reign of Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah between 1762 and 1800A.D. The exact date was not known. The story started with Mahsuri's father Pandak Maya and mother, Mek Andak Alang who were poor paddy planters. They lived in a place called Mawat in the Mukim of Ulu Langat. They had a daughter named Mek Yah. The family planted hill paddy and vegetables to eke out a living. They reared a couple of buffaloes to help them plough their small paddy land and to drink the milk. Although poor, they were contented with what they had and asked for no more.

A couple of years later, Mek Andak Alang gave birth to Mahsuri. She grew up to be a very beautiful girl. As a young girl she was the epitome of beauty. People pondered from where she inherited such beauty particularly when her parents were just plain farmers, devoid of any trait of what one might call, beauty. Probably, they argued, that someone among her ancestors, far removed, must be exceptionally beautiful.

Mahsuri was full of life. She loved to play harmless pranks on her elder sister and on her friends who came to play with her. At the same time she knew how to behave herself. She had all the appearance of an innocent village girl. Her parents and her elder sister loved her very much. To them, nothing that she did was wrong. She did not even display any sign of being conscious of her beauty. She accepted it casually as if it was something natural and not something that should be shown off.

## MAHSURI

As she grew into womanhood, Mahsuri's beauty spread throughout the island. Many people visited Pandak Maya's house just to see her. Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang welcomed them cordially. They asked their daughters to serve them black coffee. They brewed the coffee themselves. Pandak Maya planted a few coffee trees behind his house and their beans were enough to sustain them.

Mahsuri's beauty reached the ears of Datuk Seri Kerma Jaya, the chieftain of the island. The chieftain was appointed by the Sultan of Kedah to administer the island which was a district under the jurisdiction of Kedah. In those days, when travelling was difficult, the chieftain possessed all the powers of the Sultan himself, including the powers of trying any offender and sentencing him to imprisonment or even death. He also had the power to collect taxes from the people, part of which he sent to the Sultan.

Datuk Kerma was curious with Mahsuri's beauty and at once went to Kampung Mawat to see for himself. When he reached the house he found that both Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang were not at home. But Mek Yah and Mahsuri were there. He saw Mahsuri who opened the door to tell him of her parents' absence. The Datuk was struck by her beauty. He too asked himself whether the maiden was indeed Pandak Maya's daughter, and not a runaway princess who came to live on the island. He immediately made a decision to marry her.

The Datuk, however, had a problem. In his eagerness to marry Mahsuri, he had forgotten his wife at home. He already

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

had a wife who was known for her fiery temper. He could not marry Mahsuri secretly because everyone in the village would come to know about it. If the marriage were to reach the ears of his wife, he would know of no peace. Many other chieftains of Datuk Jaya's standing would not have to ask the first wife's permission to take a second or third wife. This was because these chieftains never gave their wives any right to object or even comment whatever they did. They were the masters of the house. They should be obeyed without question. Their wives would cringe with fear before them.

Datuk Jaya, however, was, in a modern term, democratic. He had always allowed his wife some liberties. As such his wife never feared him. She was a clever woman. She would object to anything she thought he did was wrong. Sometimes he was grateful to her. With her advice given from time to time, she had helped him to govern the island wisely. For this reason he had to ask her permission to take a second wife. He knew if he were to take a second wife without her permission, then life would be hell for him and she might even destroy him.

However, Datuk Jaya did not expect Mahura to agree to his proposal. He however had to try. Such an opportunity would not come by twice. He hoped that Mahura would consider that he was one of the few chieftains without a second wife. He was sometimes the butt of joke among his friends for marrying only one woman.

Datuk Jaya went home and after waiting for an appropriate time he asked the permission of his wife to take Mahsuri as his second wife. He told his wife that most of his colleagues

#### MAHSURI

had three and a few even had four. He would tell her that it would be undignified for him as a chieftain to be without a second wife.

As expected, Mahura objected vehemently. She became furious and violent and raised such an objection that the Datuk himself had to cringe with fear. She asked him whether she had failed to supply his needs. The Datuk had to admit she had supplied him with everything that he needed. Eventually the Datuk had no alternative but abandon the idea of marrying Mahsuri.

In order to prevent her husband from entertaining the idea of marrying Mahsuri at any time later, Mahura came out with a plan. She made an arrangement so that Mahsuri would marry their bachelor son, Mat Deris. The Datuk agreed to the idea rather reluctantly. He knew why his wife wanted to do this. However, to him it was some sort of a consolation. If he could not have her, then let his son have her. Mat Deris was their only son, and he should have a beautiful wife. The Datuk was of the opinion that, it would be a great pity if such a beautiful girl as Mahsuri were to marry a fisherman or a paddy planter, instead of a chieftain or a chieftain's son.

When Mat Deris was asked whether he would like to marry Mahsuri, he readily agreed. In fact he had been secretly in love with Mahsuri and had always frequented her house just to see her. In fact he had been thinking of asking his father to go to her father and ask for her hand for him. When he learnt that his father himself wanted the girl to be his second wife, he felt as if the sky had dropped on him. He felt so frustrated and dis-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

gusted to think that his girl, instead of becoming his wife, would become his stepmother. Now the situation had suddenly changed and what he wished and dreamed came so easily in his way. He knew his mother had objected to his father's marriage to Mahsuri. Because of this he could marry Mahsuri. He realised that this was some sort of a compromise settlement in the rift between his parents.

Those were the days when courtship was unknown. It was taboo for a girl and a boy to even accost one another on the village path. If they knew one another from childhood, they should keep themselves at a distance from one another when they reached puberty. At the most they could only smile to one another if they happened to meet. Both the boy or the girl had to agree on the choice of his or her mate made by the parents. The rule was, parents knew better, as they took salt earlier. They knew the right person their children should marry. They would choose a person who could make the marriage lasting and happy.

So Datuk Jaya accompanied by a big entourage went to the house of Pandak Maya and asked for the hand of Mahsuri for his son, Mat Deris. Valuable gifts were given to Pandak Maya. Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang were overjoyed, because this was what they were expecting. They sensed that Mat Deris who visited their house quite often, must have an eye for Mahsuri. They too wished that their beautiful daughter should have a handsome and worthy husband. They saw this in Mat Deris, whom they came to like. Furthermore, he was the son of the chieftain of the island. Through the marriage, they hope to become influential and important people on the island.



## MAHSURI

So when the Datuk came to their house to ask for the hand of Mahsuri for Mat Deris, Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang readily accepted. There was a Malay proverb to describe this situation. It was, "Kecil tapak tangan, nyiru ditadahkan," which if translated would be, "My hands being small, I hold out a winnowing-tray." It meant that even the palms of the hands were too small to accept the gift; a winnowing tray had to be used for the purpose. It showed that the recipient was overwhelmed with gratitude for the incredible generosity. Eventually Mahsuri was married to Mat Deris. As usual a big feast was held and the whole island were invited. Two *bersanding* ceremonies were held, when the bride and the groom were placed side by side on a dais for relatives and guests to witness. One such ceremony was held in the bride's house and the other at the groom's house. It was indeed a grand affair and a rare occasion.

Mat Deris was an upright and an honest young man. He was a respectful and filial son. His father had sent him out of the island on many difficult missions and he performed them well. He was also a great warrior. His father provided him with sufficient training in the art of fighting since his childhood days. In those days a man who did not master the art of fighting was considered feminine and a shame to his family. In spite of his young age, Mat Deris had already seen many battles and had returned home unscathed, much to the delight of his parents. His mother would tirelessly shower praises on him to those who came near her.

Mat Deris however, did not like what his mother was doing to him. He thought he was not worthy of all the praises his

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

mother had been lavishing on him. He believed that it was entirely fate whether one survived or got killed in a fight. He had witnessed many strong warriors who fell in a fight. It all depended on how strong the enemy was. Whether one was too hungry or too tired to raise a weapon to fight was also a factor in a fight. It had been said that every warrior lived on borrowed time. He did not know in which battle he would fall.

After the marriage, Mat Deris and Mahsuri lived happily. They loved each other as any happily married couple would. Mahsuri was very happy with her father's choice of a husband for her. Mat Deris was kind and considerate. She, however, did not know as to how he came to marry her, that it was a scheme by her mother-in-law to prevent her father-in-law from marrying her. She recollected that Mat Deris used to come to her house before. She then thought he was a friend of her father. But at times she caught him sneaking a look at her. She, however, never talked to him, even though at times they accidentally came face to face in her house. She knew, in spite of being a great warrior, he was very shy when confronting a woman. She knew that he must have been admiring her. But she kept the secret to herself, never divulging it even to her parents.

Mahsuri recollected the Datuk coming over to her house one day while her father was away. She concluded, wrongly of course, that Mat Deris must have told his father of his intention to marry her and the old man came to have a look at her before he could agree to the proposal. To her it was all quite romantic. One night she asked her husband whether this was how it started. Not wanting to tell a lie to her, he did not give a straight reply.

## MAHSURI

He told her he had loved her the very first day he set eyes on her and that was the reason why he frequented her house before. He also told her that he had his parents' blessing for the marriage. Mahsuri was already satisfied with the answer thinking that things could not have happened in any other way.

Mat Deris thought it was too cruel to tell his wife the real reason why he got married to her. If the reason was disclosed, it would hurt her feelings and also the feelings of his in-laws. She might lose respect for his parents. His only hope now was after his marriage, the secret would never be disclosed to her and that they could all live like a normal family, which was with love, affection and respect for one another.

The newly married lived in the house of Pandak Maya, the house of Mahsuri's father. This was quite unusual because normally a daughter-in-law would stay with her father-in-law until they acquired a house of their own. It was more so, in this case, the father-in-law was a great and rich chieftain. Although Mahura loved Mat Deris, her son very much, yet she would not have his wife stay with her under the same roof. She could not forget that her husband had previously declared his intention to marry Mahsuri, his son's wife. She was consumed by such intense jealousy that she was not capable of trusting her own husband to behave properly in such a situation.

Mahsuri's parents, on the other hand, welcomed the couple to stay with them. In fact this was what they wished. They loved Mahsuri so much that they could not bear to part from her. Furthermore, they had no son of their own and Mat Deris was so agreeable that they could not have dreamed of a better son-in-

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

law to live with them. Here, the son of the chieftain of the island, who toiled morning and afternoon in their paddy field and vegetable garden plot without being asked to do so.

They knew if Mat Deris were to stay with his parents, he would not have to work. The Datuk possessed a horde of servants and debt slaves to toil for them. Furthermore, Mat Deris could easily ask for rice from his father who had much more than he could consume. His father owned many plots of paddy land. In fact as a warrior and a chieftain's son, it was beneath his dignity to work as a farmer. His parents had many times told him not to work because they had enough for all of them. But Mat Deris continued working. He knew he could not be a chieftain's son forever. If his father died or if the Sultan were to replace his father, then he would be a chieftain's son no more. He must therefore learn to work. Further, he could not stay with his in-laws without working. As a married man he had to feed his wife and not forgetting himself and later, perhaps, his children.

Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang hoped that the couple would stay with them forever. Their house had been enlarged and there were enough room for everyone. They hoped the Datuk or his Datin would not ask the young couple to move out and stay with them later. If they were to ask, then Pandak Maya and his wife could not object, unless, of course if Mat Deris himself refused to move out. This would be most unlikely. They knew Mat Deris would not disobey his father.

This was the reason why a Malay when his daughter were to get married, he would say that he had released or *lepas* his

## MAHSURI

daughter. It meant that the daughter was no longer his dependant and now the responsibility was on the groom's side who paid for her the *pembawa* or money to take her away. This money was actually the dowry which a man in taking a wife had to pay to his wife's parents. The amount depended on the status of the parents of the bride.

The Datuk and his wife, on the other hand, never asked Mat Deris and Mahsuri to go and stay with them. It was, of course, Mahura's insistence that Mahsuri should not stay with them. She was still suspicious of her husband. Pandak Maya and his wife did not know the reason. He was all the time under the impression that, the Datuk being a rich man and a chief-tain should have asked his son and his wife to stay with him, particularly the son was the only child. Pandak Maya and his wife were however, grateful things turned out this way.

Since Mat Deris lived with Pandak Maya, Mahura missed him a lot. She also missed him when he went out of the island fighting an enemy of the state. It was during these periods of absence that she would be restless and full of anxiety whether he would come back safely or dead on the battlefield. In spite of her evil disposition, she loved her son. Like the saying that even a tiger loves its cubs. So she asked her son to return home as often as possible for her to see him and to talk to him. She would always notice his dark skin because of working too long in the sun. She asked him to stop working in the paddy field. She would be very happy if he returned home alone. But when he brought Mahsuri along with him, there was always a frown on her face. After a few of such incidents, Mat Deris stopped taking his wife to see his mother.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Mat Deris expected that after his marriage to Mahsuri his mother's attitude towards the whole incident would be forgotten. But to his surprise nothing had changed. He was sad to notice the deep mistrust that his mother still harboured against his father. He knew of certain mother-in-laws who got on very well with their daughter-in-laws and he hoped that his mother could do the same. But alas! Things did not happen that way. Even his father was keeping away from his wife, Mahsuri, for fear of his mother's sharp tongue. He now realised that his marriage did not bring happiness to his parents. In a way he was indebted to his mother, for if she were a docile ordinary housewife, his father would have married Mahsuri. She would then become his stepmother instead of his wife. Fate moved in a strange way, he thought.

About eight months later, Mat Deris and a group of men were sent by the Datuk to go to Thailand on a business trip. This was a follow-up job that he had started before. There was no other person suitable to go. With a heavy heart he set out for Thailand, hoping to complete his work quickly and return home. He could not bear to leave Mahsuri who by then was pregnant. As always in the case of a new father, he wanted to see how his first born baby looked like. He wondered whether the baby would take after him or after his wife or a mixture of both. But he had to go.

In those days, travelling was slow and tedious. From Langkawi, Mat Deris and his friends had to cross the Straits of Melaka by a small rowing boat. From the mainland they had to set out on foot to the land of the White Elephant, as Thailand

#### MAHSURI

was known at that time. The journey was dangerous and he had to face robbers and pirates on the way. They had to cook their food. There were no restaurants along the route as there are today. As such they had to carry rice, salted fish and pots and pans. Only rich people and sultans travelled in sedan cars carried by four or more people in accordance to their ability to pay to the carriers. On this trip, Mat Deris was away for quite a long time, longer than he had intended.

Mahsuri subsequently gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. A message was sent by Pandak Maya to the Datuk, the paternal grandfather who immediately came to see his first grandson. The Datuk named the boy Mat Arus. He picked up his grandson and cradled him in his arms and moved about in the room. He looked into the boy's face as he sadly recollected how the baby's parents came to be married. He knew his own wife did not like their daughter-in-law. His wife refused to come see their grandson, even after he asked her to come together with him earlier. He repented for telling his wife that he wanted to marry Mahsuri before. He should have known better not to ask for the permission. Now as a result, there was even no affection between the grandmother and the grandson, which was indeed very strange. People always admitted that the love for the grandchildren was even stronger than the love for their own children. The Datuk after taking coffee in the house of Pandak Maya, took leave and returned home.

While Mat Deris was still away, there came to Kampung Mawat one "Awang Belanga", a storyteller who hailed from Melaka named Deramang. Deramang came to the island to see

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

the beauty of the island and to inhale her fresh air. At that time Langkawi was already known for her beautiful beaches and also as a health resort. Some tuberculosis patients from the mainland came to stay in the island for months and years to be cured. They believed that the fresh salty sea breeze had a healing effect on the disease. At that time, cure for the tuberculosis was not yet known.

But Deramang did not come to Langkawi because he was ill. He was a professional storyteller and was famous in his native land of Melaka. He learnt that the island people were short of entertainments. A band of entertainers coming from the mainland to Langkawi was expensive and was therefore rare. He was a one-man show and travelling was inexpensive. So, accompanied by his only musical instrument, a *batil* which was a water container, he hired a small boat and came to Langkawi. His intention was to make as much money on the island as possible.

Like many other village folks, Pandak Maya and his wife liked to hear stories, especially about heroes and heroines with supernatural powers. Further, compared to other villagers, they were slightly better off. They still had money out of the sale of birds' nests and incense. So they hired Deramang to tell stories in their house. After a brief negotiation regarding the fee and time to play, an agreement was agreed by the parties.

The play started after dinner which was the appointed time. In the beginning only those invited came to hear the stories. Soon other audience attended, mostly uninvited. They flocked



## MAHSURI

to the house to hear the stories. The stories as told were in a bookish Malay language. Deramang's Melaka dialect was different from the Kedah dialect. He pronounced the words in full, not in the Kedah way, where many words were shortened by pronouncing only the second syllables. Before the play, Mahsuri welcomed the guests, invited and uninvited, and provided them with drinks. Mahsuri soon became very popular.

The popularity of Mahsuri came to the ears of Mahura, her own mother-in-law. Mahura became very angry. She thought it was she, the wife of the chieftain of the island who should be famous and not Mahsuri, a mere village girl. Mahura remembered that she was also the village beauty when she was a teenager before. The Datuk asked for her hand in marriage because of her beauty. At the time of marriage her husband was a mere commoner. She came to the conclusion that, it was her marriage to him that brought him luck which led to his appointment as the chieftain of the island and was eventually conferred with the coveted title of Datuk. They had been happily married for the last 22 years until Mahsuri appeared and spoilt everything.

Mahura did not realise that a lot of women as they entered middle age, would have unwanted fats concentrating on certain vital parts of the body. As a result they would cease to be a beauty, even if they were once before. But Mahura considered that she was still a village beauty, even though she had grown big at the midriff because of good food and sedate life. She was therefore jealous of Mahsuri. She thought Mahsuri had eclipsed her. In her mind, a woman in order to be loved by her

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

husband, must be beautiful. She did not seem to notice that there were so many plain looking couples who lived happily together until death parted them. All it took was tolerance, respect, and understanding for one another. For Mahura, these qualities were one-sided. She demanded them for her from her husband. But she never gave these qualities to her husband.

So Mahura blamed Mahsuri for her own unhappiness. She also noticed that since her refusal to allow her husband to take Mahsuri as a second wife, her husband had been cool towards her. She also blamed Mahsuri for displacing the love of Mat Deris, her son, from her. To her, Mahsuri was the root of all her problems. The fact that Mahsuri was the wife of her own son did not matter to her. According to her, she could easily find another girl more beautiful for his son who would be acceptable to her. She was convinced that Mat Deris, being a filial son, would listen to her. If he were to marry another girl, they could then stay together. They would then be happy. Such were the thoughts that went through her muddled mind. She came to the conclusion that Mahsuri would be more dangerous to her in the future. So she hatched an evil plot to destroy her.

She knew there were many criminals who were put to death by the Datuk. Sometimes even petty criminals were put to death. It was simpler by this way, because, if they were merely flogged with the rattan, they would commit the same crime again. It would be a bother to go and arrest them again. It was therefore easier to put them to death straight away. The village people did not mind this, because in this way they would get rid of bad people in their midst. So, in her vile mind, if Mahsuri were

## MAHSURI

exterminated, no one would bother for a village girl. It was that simple. It was the days of rough justice when life and death stalked closely together. So she plotted for the death of Mahsuri, her own daughter-in-law.

One night she told her husband she wanted to go to Mahsuri's house to hear the stories from Deramang. The Datuk gladly gave her the permission as this would be her first visit to the house of their daughter-in-law. He thought she would also see for the first time their grandchild. He hoped that she would accept Mahsuri, particularly, after seeing their grandson. He never suspected her to harbour any sinister motive for going. He offered to accompany her since it was night and it was quite a distance to walk. Mahura however insisted she was not afraid to go alone, so the Datuk did not accompany her.

Mahura then went down the house carrying a small torch and walked towards Mahsuri's house. Before reaching the house, she turned back and rushed straight to her husband. She wept, her hair disarrayed, in a state of shock. She looked like a person who had just seen a ghost. She told her husband in between sobs that she saw Mahsuri and Deramang making love in the house.

Mahura acted so well that even a prima donna of a famous opera would envy her. The Datuk, foolishly believing in her, flew into a rage. Without any further investigation, the Datuk ordered that Mahsuri and Deramang be arrested and be put to death as punishment for the heinous offence of adultery. Three guards, armed with spears, immediately went to the house of

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Mahsuri to arrest her and Deramang. When they reached the house they saw Deramang was in the process of telling a story. There were villagers still seated in the house on the veranda and listening attentively. The guards were amazed as to how adultery could have taken place in a such a condition. They asked a number of persons there whether the Datin had come over to the house. They replied, she had not.

But an order was an order. The guards were told to arrest Mahsuri and Deramang. Mahsuri was then giving milk to Mat Arus. They asked the storyteller to stop his show and told those present that they came to arrest Mahsuri and Deramang. There was a spontaneous protest by everyone in the room, demanding why they were to be arrested. When told of the reason, a melee erupted. They all knew it was a false charge. They were all there. Mahsuri and Deramang were there too. They saw them. How could they commit the crime? Pandak Maya managed to calm them down, saying that there must be a mistake and that the matter would be cleared in the morning.

During the commotion, Deramang managed to escape from the island leaving his *batil* behind. He simply vanished in the dark night. Apparently he knew it was safer to make his escape rather than face an arrest. He knew it was a trumped up charge and it was not easy to prove his innocence before a chieftain whose word was law. So the guards arrested Mahsuri alone and took her to the chieftain who ordered her to be tied pending his judgement on her the following morning.

Mahsuri was tied to a tree in front of the chieftain's house. She was left there the whole night. That was how criminals

#### MAHSURI

were treated in those days. There were no proper lockups to detain them as there were no such thing as human rights. Mahsuri wept and wailed and maintained that she was innocent of the charge. But no one listened to her. No one was around except for the three guards who kept watch and who seemed to be deaf. Other than these three, there were only mosquitoes and insects who kept her company.

Pandak Maya and his wife and many others who were listening to Deramang's story earlier hurried over to the house of the Datuk. They implored upon him to have pity on Mahsuri, his own daughter-in-law, and that she be released as she was innocent. They told him no adultery could take place because the play was on and Deraman was the main player. The Datuk was unmoved. Then Pandak Maya told him that Mahsuri had to give milk to Mat Arus, their grandchild. Still the Datuk would not listen. Pandak Maya then promised to give him ten buffaloes if he would let her go. The Datuk would have none of this. The Datuk could not believe that his wife would harm their own daughter-in-law if the incident was not true. His wife did hate Mahsuri, he admitted, but he just could not believe that she would go to the extent of fixing her daughter-in-law so. After 22 years of marriage to the woman, the Datuk still had not understood his wife well enough!

Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang then threw themselves at the feet of Mahura who was seated nearby. They now sensed that she was the source of the problem. One word from her that she had made a mistake, the whole thing would be over. She sat there stone-faced as she glared at them. She could not admit

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

that she had made a mistake. After all she had planned for this to happen. She then began to harass Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang, saying that it was a shame for them to allow their daughter to commit such a heinous crime. When they protested that Mahsuri was innocent, she accused them of collaborating in the offence and that they should be thankful for not being arrested along with their daughter.

When Pandak Maya and Mek Andak Alang heard all these, they knew everything was lost and that there was no further use of talking. They cursed the day that they agreed to the marriage of their daughter to the son of these two people. They now felt the hatred and vengeance of these two persons against them. Worst of all, they did not know the reason for it. They and all their friends went home weeping. Mat Arus who was left with their elder daughter at home, cried the whole night as if he sensed that something was wrong with his mother.

The next morning the Datuk, without any trial, sentenced Mahsuri to death for adultery. Death was the ultimate sentence for any couple who committed this crime. There were a number of stories of Malay sultans and chieftains in Malay stories in the old days who ordered innocent people to be put to death without investigation and lived to repent later. Sultan Mansur Shah, during Melaka glorious days around 1450 ordered Hang Tuah, his able admiral be put to death because there was a petition to the Sultan that Tuah had an affair with a palace maid. Fortunately the wise Bendahara or the Prime Minister did not carry out the order and instead, imprisoned him in a remote village. Hang Tuah lived to kill his bosom friend and sworn

## MAHSURI

blood brother, Hang Jebat who rebelled against the Sultan for unjustly sentencing him, Hang Tuah to death.

There was another story of the old Melaka where Sultan Mahmud in early 1500 put to death his own capable Bendahara on the false allegation that the Bendahara wanted to revolt and to seize the throne. To be disloyal to the Sultan in those days was the most heinous crime. The punishment was death not only to the perpetrator but also to the whole family. In this case the Bendahara, his wife, children, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law were all put to death, excepting his beautiful daughter, Tun Fatimah who later was taken by the Sultan to be his consort. The Sultan later repented his rash action when he learnt that the story was not true.

The same episode repeated itself in Langkawi. Mahsuri was ordered to be put to death without any proper investigation. The evidence was the false allegation of a person who hated her. Here was a big contrast between the fate of Tun Fatimah and Mahsuri. Tun Fatimah was saved from death by her beauty. But Mahsuri was ordered to be put to death because of her beauty. Had Mahsuri been a plain village girl, no harm would have befallen her.

Sometimes it was said that beauty was not an advantage. It did not guarantee happiness. Most not-so beautiful couple lived a long and happy life. A beautiful girl in those days seldom did. She sometimes became a prize to be won among the princes, chieftains, warriors, and even rogues. If she ever got married, it was not because of pure love. It was just to justify the lust of someone more powerful. She might be married to a

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

man as a prize to be won. Such a marriage would never last. She would be discarded once he got tired of her.

A warrior was assigned by the Datuk to stab Mahsuri to death. As the story goes, the warrior stabbed her with a sharp spear at the soft part on her shoulder again and again as she was tied to the tree with her hands at her back. To the warrior's surprise, the spear could not penetrate her flesh, soft though it was. He continued stabbing, but still there was not even a bruise on the flesh of the maid. The warrior then informed the Datuk of the incident. The Datuk, instead of taking heed that there was something ominous, ordered another warrior to stab her with another spear. The warrior tried but still failed.

Mahsuri, tired of being assaulted so many times on her body and realising that she could no longer live happily even though she lived, told the warrior that if he wanted to kill her he should use a special spear which she kept in the attic of her house. The warrior relayed the news to the Datuk who was there watching the execution. The Datuk again, instead of sensing that something was wrong in what was happening, did not seem to be aware of it. He ordered the spear to be fetched. They found the spear as Mahsuri said. It was handed to the Datuk who in turn handed it to another warrior to carry out the execution.

The warrior stabbed her with the spear. This time the spear penetrated her shoulder blade down to her heart. It was said that instead of red blood, white blood gushed out where the spear pierced her body. Mahsuri, before her death, in her frustration for punishing her unjustly, laid a curse on the island that it would not prosper for seven generations.



## THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

How the Datuk could become so careless and obstinate in not ordering an investigation of the allegation against Mahsuri was difficult to understand. He had been always considerate and had never been known to make any hasty decision. Perhaps he also blamed Mahsuri for causing his strained relationship with his wife. Since his violent quarrel with Mahura after he had asked for her permission to marry Mahsuri, he was harbouring a sort of a guilt whenever he saw Mahsuri. That was why, most probably, when the opportunity came to him to remove the source of his problem, he at once took it, throwing all cautions to the wind. Some people, however, were of the opinion that the Datuk was under the spell of his wife that he would do anything that she bid him to do at that time.

A few days passed. The Datuk began to reconsider what he had done. He began to question himself why he did such a foolish act. He should at least order an investigation, particularly when so many of his friends told him that Mahsuri was innocent. He should have at least postponed the execution and wait for the return of his son. It was his son, her husband, who was wronged if there was indeed an act of adultery. It was not Mahura or any other person for that matter.

Only then he wondered what and how to tell his son when he came back? What would be his reaction if he found out that his wife was not guilty and that he, the father, had made a gruesome mistake? He loved his son and did not want him to be unhappy. The Datuk heaved a big sigh. But the damage had been done. Worse still, he as the chieftain of the island, could not now make an announcement to the people that he had made a stupid mistake. He could not admit it. They would not forgive

## MAHSURI

him and the Sultan might even punish him for being so silly. So he had to live with his guilt. He knew this was not going to be easy.

Mahura too eventually realised that what she did was a gross mistake. Instead of bringing back her husband, he began to keep himself away from her more. Before, he was only cool towards her. Now he even refused to speak to her. She suspected that her husband had discovered that she made a false accusation against Mahsuri, otherwise he would not have hated her this much. Now Mahura realised that, instead of becoming more popular with the people with the death of Mahsuri, she was being shunned and avoided by them.

Mahura was aware that those people at Pandak Maya's house on that fatal night, knew that Mahsuri could not have committed the crime simply because they were there too. Word got round easily on that small island and she feared that soon all the people on the island knew that she was the murderer of her own daughter-in-law. She longed for the return of her son so that she could unburden her sorrows to him. It did not even cross her vile mind what her son would feel when he found his wife died at her own hands and that she had made a false accusation against the girl. To her, only her problems that mattered.

Pandak Maya and Mek Alang Andak were so distressed by the death of their daughter, that they could not bear to live on the island any more. They could not face the Datuk or his wife. They decided to leave the island and live on the island of Phuket. This island was under Siam, not far away from

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Langkawi. So they sold all their worldly possessions and moved to their boat and stayed there. They waited for the return of Mat Deris ready to leave at any time when he arrived. They wanted to know whether he would like to have his son, Mat Arus, or whether he would allow them to have the child. If possible, they would like to have Mat Arus with them, to remind them of Mahsuri. They were glad that neither the Datuk nor the Datin had made any attempt to keep their grandson.

A few days later, Mat Deris returned. He had completed the job he was assigned to do. On arriving at the harbour, he was surprised to see his in-laws living in a boat with a few of their belongings. Mahsuri was not there. Pandak Maya boarded his boat and handed him his son and told him the whole story. Mat Deris was broken-hearted and surprised. When he was away, he always dreamed of the joyful reunion with his beautiful wife on his return. He expected to be happy. Now his wife was dead at the hands of his own parents. It was too painful for him to bear.

Mat Deris sat down and wept as he held his son in his arms. The child also wept as his father's tears rained on him. Mat Deris bent his head and was quiet for some time. Then he told all his friends who were on the trip with him to Siam to go home. He then stepped into Pandak Maya's boat, carrying the child with him, followed by Pandak Maya. He handed the child to his mother-in-law and sat down at the rear of the boat and started to row the boat towards the sea.

Pandak Maya knew that Mat Deris wanted to go with him and he also started rowing. He was glad to have Mat Deris with

## MAHSURI

him. As they were turning round the boat, they heard a shrill voice coming from the shore. They turned round and saw it was Mahura standing on the beach crying frantically. She kept on calling Mat Deris to come back. Pandak Maya stopped rowing and looked back to see what Mat Deris would do. But Mat Deris continued to row as if he did not hear the shrill voice of his mother. He did not even look back. Then Pandak Maya saw Mahura rolling on the sand. Mat Deris still did not turn round and continued rowing. Soon they were out of the island.

Pandak Maya felt, Mahura, in losing her only son was a very severe punishment on her. He knew, she would have to live in agony with her sin until her death. She had reaped what she had sown. She was a very unhappy woman. Before she had everything that any woman would ask for. But through jealousy and greed, she had thrown everything to the wind. She lost everything that she loved and sought for.

As planned, Pandak Maya, his wife and Mat Deris rowed to the island of Phuket. They did not go to the mainland or to any other part of Kedah because they did not want the Datuk, who was a chieftain in the state, and the Datin to meddle with their lives any more. With two women and a child on board and in a small boat it was a difficult journey. They eventually reached Phuket safely. They bought a piece of paddy land and a plot of housing land on which they constructed a house. Mat Deris married Mek Yah, the elder sister of Mahsuri. Mek Yah was an ordinary looking girl and no one was jealous of her. They however, lived happily. This proved the fact that beauty did not always bring good fortune.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Today the descendants of Mahsuri and Mat Deris are still living in Phuket. Their son, Mat Arus, grew up and got married and had a number of children. A few years ago, a number of members of the Kedah Historical Society visited the descendants of Mahsuri and Mat Deris in Phuket. They made inquiries as to whether any of them had visited Langkawi. It was discovered that none of them had ever returned to Langkawi. They would not tell the reason why they did not want to go back and see the birthplace of their ancestors. Perhaps what had happened seven generations ago, was still too painful for them to bear.

Not long after Mahsuri's death the Siamese invaded Langkawi with a big army. The islanders were not prepared, but they fought bravely. Fearing that the Siamese would capture the rice granary situated at Padang Matsirat, the Datuk ordered the granary to be burnt. He thought that if the granary were to fall into the hands of the Siamese, they would have enough rice to feed them during the fight. They would stay longer in Langkawi and would continue with the war.

The granary was accordingly burnt to the ground. Even today, a visitor may be able to pick up a few pieces of the burnt rice at the place where the granary was. The burnt rice would resurface after a heavy rain. Some of these burnt rice were still in one piece, but some were broken in two or three. Some visitors gathered them and took them home as medicine.

Some warriors however thought, the Datuk was wrong in ordering the granary to be burnt. By burning it, it would also deprive the local warriors of food. Without food, they too could

## MAHSURI

not fight. They were of the opinion that, scourge earth policy should not be applied on an island as there was no other place to retreat. It could be applied only on the mainland where there was ample food at the place where they withdrew. Only then the attackers would be hungry while the defenders were still fresh. If the granary was to be burnt at all, they thought, it should be only as a last resort when everything was lost. Here the Langkawi warriors were still fighting when the order to burn the granary was given.

This was the time of hand-to-hand fight. It depended much on personal strength and for this, sufficient food was essential. It was a time when a warrior could stop fighting and sneak out of the battlefield, had his food, then went back to fight.

Being outnumbered, Langkawi warriors lost although they fought bravely. The island fell into the hands of the Siamese. They killed many people including the Datuk and Mahura and took many people on the island back to Siam as slaves. Some people in Langkawi believed that it was the curse of Mahsuri that brought the tragedy as a punishment for the unjust treatment against her.

The island did not prosper for seven generations. Some people complained that what Mahsuri did in cursing the whole island to be barren, was wrong and unjust. Other people other than the Datuk and Mahura did no harm to her. Instead they loved her. Then, why should they too be punished? Only the Datuk and Mahura who should be punished as they were the culprits. But that was how the story was told.

#### THE LEGENDS OF LANGKAWI

Langkawi after the curse of Mahsuri began to lose her attractions. Every attempt to develop the island failed miserably. Not many people liked to visit the island any more. Even in as late as 1930 when the curse was still effective, Langkawi was regarded as a place for outcasts. A form of punishment against any government officer in those days was to transfer him to Langkawi. After a few years of service there, or if he had completed his term of punishment, he would be recalled to serve other parts of the State.

In the year 1990, the curse expired. Seven generations have passed. Langkawi began to prosper and business started to boom. It has turned into a most sought for holiday resort in the world. Air jets fly in and out by the hour carrying loads of tourists. Hotels and chalets spring up like mushroom after the rain. Price of lands have spiralled up and are even more costly than certain parts of Kuala Lumpur. Village people enjoy a life of plenty and there are enough jobs for everyone.

Indeed Mahsuri's curse has completed its course and in its wake, it brings prosperity and well being to the people. Perhaps Mahsuri knew before her death, in order to bring forth this desirable and joyous conditions around, was to lay a curse on the island for seven generations. If this were the case, then Mahsuri did not do injustice to the people of Langkawi. She deserves the reverence and love of the people.

## **The Historical Legends**

This chapter relates to us a couple of historical anecdotes, such as, the story about the discovery of the “mysterious grave” and the “curse of Mahsuri”. Both episodes tell stories of two famous characters in the history of Langkawi.

It was said the mysterious grave was that of Tun Jana Khatib who was unjustly sentenced to death in far away island of Singapura, the present day Singapore. Although he was buried in Singapore his grave was found in Langkawi.

The second story tells us about how Mahsuri, the innocent wife of a warrior was wrongly accused of being adulterous and sentenced to death. It was said that when her body was stabbed with a spear white blood spirited out indicating her innocence. While in the case of Tun Jana Khatib the blood that flowed out of his body mysteriously solidified into a red coloured stone.

Both Tun Jana Khatib and Mahsuri were victims of circumstances. They were sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit. Tun Jana Khatib was accused of trying to attract the attention of the consort of the Raja of Singapore. He migrated from his place of birth, Pasai in Sumatera to Singapore in search of better fortune. While he was wandering around the island he accidentally strayed into the forbidden garden of the Raja’s palace. His presence attracted the consort’s attention because his dress looked different from those worn by the local people. Tun Jana Khatib, realising that the lady was looking at him decided to show off his skill in magic. He failed to realise that the Raja was also



observing his antics. The Raja became jealous and accused Tun Jana Khatib of enticing his consort.

Mahsuri, on the other hand, was accused of wrong --doing while her husband was away. As a warrior he was ordered to defend Langkawi from being attacked by the Siamese. While he was away, Mahsuri had kindly invited a stranger to stay in her house. Her action angered her neighbours who accused her of adulterous relationship with her guest. Thus, both Mahsuri and Tun Jana Khatib were unjustly accused and sentenced to death.

Tun Jana Khatib was considered as a historical figure. He was of Arab descent. His forefathers came to settle down in Pasai on the Island of Sumatera, as traders and missionaries. He came to Singapore during the time when the island nation was at the height of its prosperity. While there he was accused of wrong-doing and unjustly sentenced to death. The strange thing was that although his body was buried in Singapore his grave had mysteriously appeared in Langkawi !

Mahsuri was another historical figure. Like Tun Jana Khatib she was sentenced to death for a crime she did not commit. As the death sentence was carried out she managed to utter a curse that the Island of Langkawi be turned into a desolate and impoverished place lasting for seven generations. Her family members then fled to the Island of Phuket in South Thailand to escape punishment.

Tun Jana Khatib was not a highly religious person but he was a skillful magician, having learned the skill from his ancestors. However, he had his weakness. In the presence of pretty women he could not contain his feelings to show off his ability to perform mysterious tricks to entertain them. That weakness had caused him to lose his life. He was caught while he was in the palace ground trying to show his magic to the Raja's consort. The Raja became furious and commanded that Tun Jana Khatib be punished for his wrong-doing.

The stories regarding the punishment meted out to the two innocent victims clearly showed that there were elements of injustice. The sentences passed down to them were done without much deliberation. The allegations were based on jealousy and the punishment were hurriedly carried out. The leaders who meted out the sentences were authoritarians. One of them was a Raja and the other was a chieftain. Both of them should have acted with great discretion. Such acts of impartiality had occurred time and time again in the history of the Malay people. The great warrior Hang Tuah was unjustly sentenced to death by the Sultan of Melaka. Likewise the Bendahara of Melaka and his family were punished without any due consideration. It was because of such injustices that the victims were to have been given supernatural powers, such as the ability to utter curses to punish those who were not being fair to them.

The story about Tun Jana Khatib took place around the year 1200 AD, while that of Mahsuri happened between 1762 and 1800 AD.

Datuk Karma Jaya, the chieftain of Langkawi was attracted by the beauty of Mahsuri and had planned to take the young maiden as his second wife. But his plan was thwarted by his first wife, Mahura, who hurriedly made arrangement to marry her son Mat Deris with Mahsuri. Soon after their marriage Mat Deris received orders to go and stop the advancing Siamese army from attacking Langkawi.

While Mat Deris was away a story teller by the name of Deraman came from Melaka. He was invited by Mahsuri to stay in her house. When Mahura came to know of her daughter-in-law's action she became suspicious of her. She then made wild allegation that Mahsuri had committed adultery with Deraman during her husband's absence. Such accusation had led to Mahsuri being severely punished by her own father-in-law, Datuk Karma Jaya.

As a consequence of his rash action Datuk Kama Jaya and his wife Mahura felt sorry for what they had done. They had killed their daughter-in-law out of spite and at the same time had spoilt their son's family lives.

After the tragic incident, Mahsuri's parents Pandak Maya and Mek Alang Andak migrated to Phuket Island because they could not bear the loss of their beloved daughter. Mat Deris too was overcome by the circumstances leading to the death of his loving wife. He decided to move over to Phuket Island to be with his father-in-law and his family. He took along with his son, Mat Aris. There he married Mek Yah, Mahsuri's elder sister.

After the death of Mahsuri and her curse on Langkawi, the people of the island had experienced one tragedy after another. The armies of Siam attacked Langkawi. Datuk Kama Jaya ordered his people to set fire to the houses storing rice in Padang Matsirat to deny the enemies of their food supply. The burnt grain of rice can still be found in the ground around Padang Matsirat to this day. After conquering Langkawi the Siamese army killed Datuk Kama Jaya and his wife Mahura.

The year 1990 brought Mahsuri's curse in Langkawi to an end. The island is now a free part and a world renowned tourist destination.

## CONCLUSION

The study on “The Legend of Langkawi : Myths and Management” consists of five chapters. The five chapters deal with five types of legends, namely Supernatural Legends, Animal Legends, Cave Legends, Human Legends and Historical Legends. Supernatural Legends tell stories about Gedembai and Princesses from Fairyland. Animal Legends relate to us the activities of Garuda, the big bird and the white crocodile. Stories about vampires lurking in eerie caves of Gua Langsuir, and about strange happenings in Gua Cerita are categorised as Cave Legends. The Human Legends portray characters like Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak, while Historical Legends relate stories about historical figures like Tun Jana Khatib and Mahsuri.

All the five legends are folklores well known in classical Malay Literature. Although they are considered as myths, stories that originated in ancient times dealing with beliefs about the early history of mankind and giving explanations of natural events, they are still relevant to what is being discussed, what is happening and what is being done in modern society.

In the first chapter we are introduced to two supernatural creatures. They were the ferocious Gedembai and the enchanting Princess from Fairyland. The sadistic Gedembai would cast a spell on anyone she disliked, turning them into stones, while the Princess had no qualms about causing much hardship to those who displeased her.

Gedembai symbolised a domineering person whose name struck terror in the hearts of men, while the Princess possessed the power to enchant people. Gedembai even had the courage to disobey King Solomon and in the end she was defeated by a princess. The princess on her part had caused a divorcee to perform incestuous relationship with her own son.

The second chapter tells the story of two animals -- the big bird Garuda and the White Crocodile. Like the Gedembai, the Garuda was described as a creature that was envious of human success. According to the story the Princess had turned a mother who was a divorcee into a beautiful young lady in order to entice her own son to have sexual relationship with her. In another instant the Princess turned a boy into a White Crocodile.

In another story about Garuda we learned how the bird became jealous when the Prince of Rome married the Princess of China. He showed his anger by causing harm to those who accompanied the bridal procession. But in the story about the White Crocodile there was an element of love, faithfulness, sacrifice as well as sorrow and the feeling of dejection. Illicit love had led to incest and adulterous relationship resulting in illegitimate babies.

At present the world is filled with the feeling of jealousy, envy, suspicion, slander and acts of terrorism in every aspect of life – politics, economy, business, education, etc. People resort to all sorts of ways to topple their adversaries.

Nowadays, in politics the use of poison-pen letters, money, acts of sabotage stabs in the back and betrayal appear to be the order of the day. It is common in politics for friends to become foes and vice versa. Among the youths of the country there have been numerous cases of criminal activities arising from misconducts, parental attitudes and differences in social status. Promiscuous sex lead to a lot of negative effects and moral decadence.

Chapter three relates a number of incidences affecting the inhabitants of Langkawi. The story of Gua Langsuir tells about how the people were deceived by beautiful maidens and their sweet voices. On the other hand, the story of Gua Batu Putih compares man's good behaviour as compared to that of other creatures and the story of Gua Cerita reminds us of man's good and bad deeds.

Such stories remind us of present day happenings. Very often we hear of people who fall prey to others through deceit. Increasing number of criminal cases appear in courts. White collar crimes are on the increase and during election campaigns members of opposing parties use slanders and threats to damage the reputation of their opponents. They seem to care more for material gains by whatever means. They make empty promises for personal glorification.

Chapter four gives an account of human conflicts in ancient times which are still true to this day. According to the story human conflicts arose among the three characters – Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak. Mat Cincang was a most obnoxious character who

always picked up quarrel with Mat Raya, a man with a good heart, who would avoid disagreement with anybody, while Mat Sawak would be the mediator to settle differences between the two enemies. All the three of them were cursed by Gedembai. Mat Raya and Mat Cincang were turned into mountains and Mat Sawak became a hill. Till now Bukit Sawak stands between Gunung Raya and Gunung Cincang as if stopping them from quarreling.

In the present day context there still exist the three types of people as portrayed by the Legends of Langkawi. On the one hand there are those who are honest and responsible, but there also those who are never honest not responsible whose actions are unpleasant and undesirable. In between the two groups is the third one who usually act as mediators, who dare to take risks in order to pacify the two warring factions. They play the role of intermediaries to settle disputes. Every now and then we do come across people who are willing to sacrifice their time to stand in between two or more parties who are at loggerheads, particularly among politician, economists, educationists, psychologists, etc.

In chapter five, we are faced with people and their particular ways of behaving. These characters are more realistic because they are based on historical facts. Mat Raya, Mat Cincang and Mat Sawak were imaginary characters whereas Tun Jana Khatib and Mahsuri were historical figures, although there were some bits of fantasies about them. It was said that when Tun Jana Khatib was stabbed to death the blood that flowed out of his body turned into a red coloured stone, and although he was put to death in Singapore



his grave mysteriously appeared in Langkawi. In the case of Mahsuri her blood was white in colour to prove her innocence.

Tun Jana Khatib was said to be a victim of jealousy. He incurred the wrath of the Sultan when he was accused of trying to win the heart of his consort. Mahsuri was the victim of her envious mother-in-law because of her beauty. She was accused of having an affair with her husband's friend when he accepted her invitation to stay in her house while her husband was away.

Life is always full of conflict, especially when it concerns the relationship between men and women as in the case of Tun Jana Khatib and Mahsuri. Jealousy and envy often lead to disastrous consequences. In both cases the victims were wrongly accused and condemned to death. Because of their innocence they were said to possess supernatural powers and were considered as martyrs. Tun Jana Khatib's grave was treated with great respect by the people of Langkawi, while Mahsuri, in her last breath uttered her curse that Langkawi would suffer badly for seven generations after her death.

I write the Legends of Langkawi for various reasons. Firstly, I intend to convince the readers that the classical Malay Literature contains numerous stories, such as those that are found in Langkawi. Secondly, the legends have very close affinity with the history of Langkawi itself. Thirdly, I strongly believe that such legends could serve as lessons to be gained by us in our endeavour to manage our day-to-day tasks.

In my capacity as a Speaker, I have observed all sorts of characters, behaviour and attitude of people within as well as outside the House of Parliament. With that, I strongly feel that many useful lessons can be learnt from legends, folklores and fables handed down to us by story tellers from bygone generations.

I believe that such lessons can make us all the more wiser, more symphatetic and more tolerant to manage and administer our duties to make our beloved country a truly happy place for everybody.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Tun Mohd. Zahir obtained his early education in Malay School, Hosba, a small village situated between Jitra and Changloon, Kedah. After completing primary schooling, he went to study at an English secondary school, Sultan Abdul Hamid College in Alor Setar. When he was in Standard VII, World War II broke out in 1942. He had to stop studying.

After the war in 1946 he obtained the Cambridge School Certificate as a private candidate. In 1953 he went to London to study law at Lincoln's Inn. He was called to the Malayan Bar in 1956. He practised as an advocate and solicitor in Alor Setar from 1956 until 1975.

In 1959 he was elected the Kedah State Legislative Assembly and was appointed as Kedah State Executive Council Member. Four months later he was appointed Senator which he served until 1964. He resigned as Senator and in the same year and was elected a member of the House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) which he served until 1969.

A prolific writer, his works are as follows :

1. "Sungai Korok Wan Mat Saman", a drama published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
2. "Pendekar Kundur", a drama published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
3. "Cik Siti Wan Kembang", a drama published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
4. "Bukit Puteri", a drama published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
5. "Mengejar Kebahagiaan", a novel published by Berita Publishing.

6. "Secebis Sejarah Sekolah Hosba", a book on the early days of Hosba School.
7. "Bukit Tembaga", a novel published by Berita Publishing.
8. "The Unfederated Malay States Land Laws".
9. "The Laws of the Islamic Religious Schools".
10. "Amalan dan Tradisi Parlimen". Published in "Dewan" magazine 1990.
11. "The Early Days of Sarawak". Published in "Dewan" magazine 1990.
12. "Sejarah dan Asal-Usul Negeri Perak Darul Ridzuan". Published in "Dewan" magazine 1991.
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