

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

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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.

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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 mention 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

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-

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