

***Menora* Performance: A Research in Bukit Yong Village, Pasir Puteh, Kelantan, Malaysia**

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Abstract. This paper is a research on a folk performance known as *menora* which takes place in the state of Kelantan, Malaysia. This research is carried out through observation, planned interview, and explicit research on *menora* performance organised in Bukit Yong Village, Pasir Puteh, Kelantan. The objective of this research is to record the folklore which remains among the Siamese community and performs until today. This research does not only focus on the description of *menora* performance by Bukit Yong group, but also will look at the role of *menora* in the community. This is because previous research and observation done concentrate more on the performance, rather than exploring the role of the performance. This paper will try to record *menora* performance in the district and provide relevant interpretation related to the community. Concurrently, this will determine the art of *menora* as a cultural heritage which represents the identity of the Siamese community as a whole. This research is relevant in today's context because this research discusses on the aspect of unique art and heritage owned by the Siamese community in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Menora* Performance, Documentation, Bukit Yong, Unique Heritage of the Siamese Community.

1. Introduction

Performance art is a sign or symbol of a community who create, preserve and develop it. In Malaysia especially, starting from Perlis to Johor, including the East Coast up to Kelantan: various traditional performances were created, performed, and preserved in symbolizing continuity in their life. Art performance or tradition plays an important role in their life whether in daily, seasonal, or official ceremony held by the community. Traditional performance normally involves three are elements, they are speech (dialogue), dance (rhythmical steps and gestures), and music (singing). The combination of these three elements, blend and cannot be separated because by isolating one of the elements, the performance will not work. In carrying out the traditional performance activity, men and women will get involve in ceremony , causing the audience to stay till the end of the performance, so this paper will discuss about a folk art heritage known as *menora* performance in Kelantan, Malaysia. This folk performance or categorised as folklore by Alan Dundes (1965) and James Dananjaja (1984); grouped in oral tradition by Miles Foley (1981) and Mohd Taib Osman (1976); and also grouped in Malay traditional theatre by Mohamed Ghouse Nasarudin (2000) as an important heritage in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia because it is able to remain strong in the globalisation era and the challenge of modernisation today.

2. The Siamese Community in Bukit Yong Village

Bukit Yong Village is situated 50 km in the south of Kota Bharu City, and 6 km from Pasir Puteh Town. Bukit Yong is in Pasir Puteh territory and is the second area with the Siamese community as the minority of the residents after Semerak. Bukit Yong Village is also a village which is situated near to the border of Kelantan-Terengganu. The residential location of the Siamese in this village is quite far from the border of Kelantan-Thailand and the rest of the Siamese village areas especially in the district of Tumpat. Looking at the Siamese community and also their lifestyle in Bukit Yong, it seems like being in a Malay village. According to Hanapi Dollah (1995), based on the socio-cultural aspect, the Siamese can be classified as part of Malay ethnic. This is because of their features, cloth, lifestyle, and they speak fluently in Malay, showing

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that they are about the same as the Malay. After all, they are known as ‘Malays who are Buddhist’ (Golomb 1978: 24). The only obvious difference is that there are dogs and pigs prowling as their pets. Regardless of that, the existence of these animals serves as the identity for their village (Hanapi Dollah 1995: 7). The other difference is that there is Goutama Buddha’s temple to symbolise as a reminder for the respected person who becomes the chieftain in their religious belief. This difference is only in the aspect of religion.

3. *Menora*

Menora is a type of the Siamese traditional theatre or known as dance drama. Besides that, *menora* is in the form of Siamese drama theatre (Santos 1995; *Kamus Dewan* 2002). *Menora* is categorised as a type of popular Siamese traditional art in the south of Thailand and in the north of Malaysia (Mohamad Nazri Ahmad 2008; Grunberg 1976). According to Guelden (2005: 6), this art is among the earliest form in Siamese dance, which is influenced by other various traditional theatre genres. It is also said that *menora* comes from Thailand, however *menora* in the contemporary context is a blend of two cultures, the Malay and Siamese cultures. Dancing and singing in *menora* is part of the Siamese culture, meanwhile the drama and dialogue are part of the Malay culture and they have close resemblance with *makyung* in Malaysia (Grunberg 1976; Santos 1995; Morton 1976; Noonsuk 1995). *Menora* which combines the elements of storytelling, singing, acting, and also medical rituals, is still favoured and accepted by the community in Bukit Yong Village, Pasir Puteh, Kelantan.

4. *Menora* Group in Bukit Yong Village

Before Bukit Yong *Menora* Group is established, *menora* activity has been carried out in the community. Only when and where it was first started cannot be confirmed. According to Amnuai a/l Eler (2010), the beginning of *menora* activity in Bukit Yong Village was only held in front of Eh Tid a/l Ah Sing house. Nowadays, the community’s interest towards *menora* is still at the average level. Researchers think that the community is less interested to get involved in the *menora* world because of the lack of exposure towards the activity. According to Amnuai (2010), Bukit Yong *Menora* Group was active in 2002. This is shown through performance held by the group. Places for roadshow by Bukit Yong *Menora* Group is Ketik Buluh Stage in Semerak, Balai Stage in Bachok, Bukit Pana Stage in Tanah Merah, Terbok Stage in Tumpat, Jubakar Stage in Tumpat, Teraset Stage in Pasir Mas, Merang Stage in Kuala Terengganu, Renek Village Stage in Jertih, Ugang Nawacaning in Tanah Merah, Kubang Panjang in Tumpat, Tujuh in Tumpat and a lot more public places.

5. Bukit Yong Village *Menora* Group Performance

The leader of Bukit Yong *Menora* Group Performance is Eler a/l Cha Perat or better known as Pak Mat Tok Nora. To act as the dancers, this group trains girls among Pak Mat’s relatives. Other characters include the king, a princess, the queen, *peran* (a joker), *marshi* (a monk) and *Ibu Bota* (a monster). In terms of equipment for the performance, a complete set includes cloth, *kecopong* (*sert*), and musical instruments [clarinet or flute(*serunai*), gong (*tetawak*), *rebab*, *cerek* (*cerik*), drum (*gendang*), *geduk* (*klong*), small cymbals (*kesi*), *gedombak* (*tharp*), small gong or two gongs suspended in a wooden frame (*canang*)]. Sometimes this group invites other people to join the group if one of the group members or players is sick or busy that he cannot afford to delay the matter any longer. The performance involves three parts; they are stage opening, breaking story, and stage closing.

5.1. Stage Opening

Before a *menora* performance is carried out, stage opening ceremony will be held. This ceremony takes place on the first night of the *menora* performance. This ceremony should be carried out to ensure the players and the whole performance run smoothly without any disturbance from the evil spirit. In the stage opening ceremony, ritual-like ceremony will be carried out regardless of whether the performed *menora* is in the form of entertainment, festivity, or official ceremony. The purpose of this ritual is to coax and worship the spirit in order to ensure the performance runs smoothly and the audience and players are protected from any sinful act till the end of the performance. Items used in the opening stage ceremony is roasted chicken, virgin coconut,

joss-stick, white cloth, a pillow, a mat, *cerana* (a metal container with betel leaves and areca nut), raw thread, three candles, white rice, incense, sandalwood, and money (RM2.25 for ordinary performance, RM12.25 for a longer performance). In the opening stage ceremony, three candles will be lightened on the white cloth and placed at each corner of the stage. Incense will be burnt and magic spells will be uttered to worship the spirit in front of the players who gather on the stage. Then, white rice will be scattered around the stage, followed by the music to signal the beginning of *menora* performance.

5.2. Breaking Story Ceremony

Menora performance in the form of entertainment starts in the second phase of the performance known as breaking story. The first phase is only on stage opening ceremony, music, song, and also various stage ceremony processes will be carried out for the sake of everyone's safety. The ceremony will be carried out by a shaman, who is known as Tok Menora or Pak Si Tong. After the stage opening ceremony is over, breaking story ceremony will be held. To begin, Pak Si Tong will appear on the stage wearing a complete costume to start the performance by making the twelve steps in *menora* performance. The twelve steps in *menora* performance involve movements, such as the step in showing respect towards the teacher, dancing and singing without music except for *kerek (ching)*, and later on followed by the drum and *rebana*. The fourth step is the step of a monkey in search of lice, the step of a crocodile flipping its tail, the step of an elephant grazing the grass, the step of a bird bathing by the shore, the step of a bird ready to catch fish, the step of a deer walking in the forest, the step of a deer running, the step of a monkey hanging on the branch of a tree, and the twelfth step is the step of a moving worm. These steps are portrayed in the form of gentle and attractive dance. At the end of the dance which takes about 30 minutes, a chorus group will appear and sit at a corner known as *rong nora*.

5.3. Stage Closing

The stage closing ceremony is carried out at the end of the performance or during the final night of *menora*. At the beginning of this ceremony, turmeric rice will be scattered at each corner of the *menora* performance stage. Then, Tok Menora and the girls will sing a song three times to signal the final song. The myth of this stage closing ceremony is when they take off the seven pieces of the stage roof. It is believed that the purpose is to let Mesi Mala out through the open roof and return to its original place. However, this act in the stage closing ceremony is no longer practiced because of the use of zinc as the roof of the *menora* stage or the use of only a tent as the stage today. Nowadays, normally when stage closing ceremony is carried out in *menora* performance, only dancing and singing, and also relevant act will be performed to replace the myth of taking off the seven pieces of the stage roof.

6. The Role of *Menora* for the Siamese

According to Golomb (1978: 60), in certain situation, *menora* is performed to celebrate religious ceremony and also involves the monks (*bikhu-bikhu*). Ginsburg (1972: 180) also agreed with Golomb regarding the role of *menora* as a reflection of religious values to the people who practice it when he said that "the occasion for *menora* performance today is most typically temple fair... the performance serves as an offering to a particular spirit...".

6.1. Ritual

Before 1950's, the common act of worship among the Siamese minority group was worshipping the beach (*hlong rebang*). This act of worshipping was carried out in Balai Bachok Village. Followed by worshipping the village (*wai nai baan*), this act of worshipping was often carried out in Jubakar, Tumpat, Kelantan. Besides that, the activities of worshipping the paddy (*wai thong*), worshipping the rear end of a boat (*wai lang bot*), worshipping the spirits and worshipping the age were also practiced among the Siamese minority group in Kelantan. These ceremonies were often carried out by the Siamese minority group in the sixth month of the Siamese calendar (Ku Juk Kian 1990: 49). These acts of worshipping were carried out because the system of belief of the people who produced this art is different of the rest. The Chinese minority are also involved in the ritual. In *Baan Malaj* for example, the Chinese are directly involved in the act of worshipping the beach. It is still practiced until today.

6.2. Vow

Releasing or correcting a vow, the ceremony is known as *kaebun* among the Siamese. This ceremony is carried out by a person who successfully achieves his vow. For example, a sick person has an intention to perform *menora* once he recovers. If he truly recovers, it is compulsory for him to fulfil his intention by carrying out *kaebun* ceremony or in other words, releasing his vow. This tradition still continues in *Lak Muang* which is situated right in front of Buddhist Emerald Temple (*Wat Phra Kaew*) in Bangkok (Raja Masitah Raja Ariffin 1988: 64).

6.3. Medical Treatment

Menora is considered as a medium in worshipping the power of the unseen in order to cure illness. During *menora* performance, patient will be on the stage and Pak Si Tong will utter magic spells because this character is believed to have magic power or *sagsid*. *Menora* is also performed when one of the community members is possessed by the evil spirit (*thorng sohkrok*). Once the shaman finds out that the patient is experiencing *moo nora*, *menora* performance will be carried out to chase away the evil spirit and the bad luck that the patient is experiencing.

6.4. Entertainment

It is undeniable that *menora* performance only functions as a source of entertainment. For example, they are invited by the Malay and certain organiser such as the government on the day of the king's birthday celebration (worshipping the age). Nowadays, it is no longer practiced. It is also performed for the sake of entertainment for the public by selling tickets. Normally, every celebration and religious ceremony is seen as incomplete without *menora* and also *wayang kulit*, *wayang gedek* or *ramvong* (Mohamed Yusof Ismail 1980: 12). Entertainment is important in a performance. The objective is to attract more audience.

7. *Menora* as Racial Identity

The product of art combination in *menora* performance is unique as there is none in other art performance. *Menora* performance is in the form of fine movement, gentle dance, sweet voice, and delicate fingers movement while performing. *Menora* is performed based on taste being assimilated with the local scenario. In the performance, Thai language is mixed with Kelantanese Malay dialect. The mixture of Thai language and Kelantanese Malay dialect is common phenomena, especially in the breaking story, partly because most of the audience are Malay and Chinese. The uniqueness of *menora* as a Siamese identity is obvious in its costume collection. The power of attraction in *menora* can be seen from the costume worn by the actors. The costume remains the same from *Jataka* [the story of the birth of Buddha] which is worn by Pak Si Tong (Tok Nora [*makyung*; *pakyong*]). He will wear a complete costume including *kecopong*, *canggai*, socks, three bangles (*kemelai* or *lok rat*), *klong malai* and jasmine is added, with a pair of wings at the back. Regardless of the history of *menora* and its role, it is already the Siamese identity through this art. True! Kershaw (1982) once emphasized that "Nora is an identity of the Siamese community, besides having pigs, tar trees, Thai language, and monastery (*Wat* or *ketik*) in the Siamese community". This identity is not specifically for the Siamese in Kelantan (Malaysia), but also the whole Siamese community (South Thailand).

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, *menora* is a famous traditional art among Kelantanese, especially the Siamese. *Menora* is the only Siamese traditional art which remains until today, even though it is a different era altogether (globalisation). Bukit Yong *Menora* Group is a group that remains active in preserving their forefathers' traditional art from being forgotten like the rest of the art. Even though *menora* has long survived, however *menora* still preserves the three main components of the performance; stage opening, breaking story, and stage closing. *Menora* is not only a medium of entertainment, more than that, *menora* is a performance in the form of ritual practise by the Siamese in harmonising their own community.

9. Acknowledgements

Thank you, especially to Mr. Mohamad Nazri Ahmad as the Head Researcher on the art of the Siamese community in Kelantan, Malaysia. Thank you also to the Centre of Language Studies, Malay Literature and

Culture, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for the willingness to cooperate with the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara Penang in completing this research.

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