THOUGHTS, DICTIONS AND FORMS OF HUMOUR IN MALAY PANTUN

By: Tengku Intan Marlina Tengku Mohd Ali
Salinah Ja’afar

Abstract

Malays and pantun are inseparable. The Malay spirit appears to be bound to the form and expression of pantun. Long before, pantun is an effective form of expression, especially in addressing any issues subtly (Nik Safiah Karim, 2006:136). Malay pantun posses the elements of humour; thoroughly compose for entertainment and insinuation. The hint of humour reflects the uniqueness and creative thinking of Malays. Words selected or diction used clearly shows just how ingenious Malays are in selecting words for humour. Words are properly chosen in line with the couplets and quartrain. Thought and diction are associated in making a splendid and interesting pantun. The humour included in pantun is carefully arranged and in accordance with rhyme and rhythm for the listeners delight. Advice and guidance are incorporated in a comical way. The elements of humour in pantun which exhibit the thought, diction and forms are interesting to discuss. Hence, this paper will be discussing the aspects of thought, diction and forms of humour in Malay pantun.

Introduction

Pantun is Malay’s important and priceless legacy. Even though pantun is no longer regarded as part of daily speech or widely used by the Malay community, the beauty and uniqueness of pantuns that illustrates Malay’s creative thinking should not be dismissed. Either directly or
indirectly, one would always stumble into pantun. One can hear the pantun every day in beautiful Malay song lyrics. Pantun in lyrics form would always be found appealing by youngsters (Zainal Abidin Bakar, 1984:3). In the old times, pantun was synonym with the Malay soul and the Malay culture. With time, pantun has drifted away from its society. The youths of today have all but forgotten the pantun which once plays a major part in the lives of the old Malay society that had always revered to manners and courtesy.

Muhammad Haji Salleh (2006:1) concluded that idioms and proverbs were the most important ways in channelling the thoughts of the Malay of the archipelago. Through wisdom and poetic associations, the lines sketch the people's soul, giving voice to issues faced perpetually for hundreds of years, in fact thousands, in matters of practicality and hearts, physically and spiritually, which would later be translated into a mixture of opinions, values, laws, love and affection and a multiplicity of emotions. Here we find the literati/sage functioning simultaneously as poet and thinker/sage, two different functions that are combined most naturally.

Pantun is one of the traditional Malay poetry that is still popular until today. It is widely spread through a variety of media such as song lyrics and at functions like weddings. In fact it is expanding on the Internet (pantun.net) and a world-wide berbalas pantun (where a person directs a pantun at someone else, and yet that person has to reply with another pantun) participation. According to Muhammad Haji Salleh (2006), a new form of creativity in the world of pantun can be found in printed form, the oral (radio), visual (TV) and the cyber world, on the Internet and via short message services or SMS, throughout the world.

Malays always emphasize on harmony in their communications. Once, pantun was a social medium used by the Malays for communicating with the purpose of avoiding embarrassment to whomever they were interacting with. Through pantun, Malay society discussed issues subtly and meticulously using idiomatic expressions so that issues expressed could easily be accepted by the other party. Therefore rhythm and diction were chosen with great care. This demonstrates the Malay's form of thinking, that they were always aware of their surroundings and were never outdated.

Pantun goes to show how the culture of traditional Malay society did not criticize openly but subtly. Words used in pantuns are symbols that possess implicit meanings and connotations. As with most works found in traditional Malay, we couldn't tell who the real authors were. But from the pantuns inherited we know that they were shrewd observers of nature and society. They were aware of the happenings and delivered their censure and criticism to bring about good. Pantun authors used metaphors, similes and personifications rich in natural imagery. These
images of nature needed to be interpreted before the true meaning could be fathomed.

With regards to thought, diction and humour in pantun, it can be said that the humourous elements have the following signification:

1. Satires
2. Jokes
3. Homilies

Based on the elements above, this paper will discuss elements of humour in pantun related to the aspects of thought, diction and form as obtained from the book Pantun Kelakar (2005) by Tenas Effendy, Kumpulan Pantun Melayu (1983) compiled by Zainal Abidin Bakar, Pantun Melayu (1961) edited by R.J. Wilkinson and R.O. Winstedt, and the book Khazanah Melayu Klasik (2008) by Iliadam. Consistent with the space and time discussed, form will be confined to the commonly found quartrain and couplets pantuns.

Joke and Wit in Pantuns

Traditional Malay society placed great importance on courtesy and dignity of others. Advice, homily or satire that must be delivered must be done so, subtly and with great care. Sometimes, advice and sarcasm are in such beautiful phrasing that the listener would not have any heartfelt, but would subtly understand the innuendos instead. Sometimes the elements of witticism were purposely inserted so that the sarcasm could be expressed delicately. Issues delivered facetiously would be wake-up calls to listener without creating tension between the teaser and the person mocked.

With great subtlety Malays were able to slip in satirical elements in the form of humour which not only entertained but also presented harmoniously. Teasing someone skinny, for example, was done effortlessly. Although the words chosen when teasing the skinny seemed coarse, but by putting them in pantun form, the teasing somehow would not offend the listener. Examples can be seen as follows:
The above humour pantuns are composed to tease and deride skinny people. The pantuns are appropriate for any age group because the words do not exhibit neither negative elements nor rudeness. Every word chosen, or the diction, is picked from local flora and fauna. The word "anak tikus" (baby mouse) were chosen because it rhymes with "kurus" (skinny) and therefore used as a "pembayang" or "clue" for what is to come. The clue used for skinny has been chosen for its suitability...
so the spoken sound and rhyme will be appropriate for the message delivered. Repetition of words in the clue for the skinny could also be found. Besides the skinny, ridicule on the obese are also composed in terms of humourous pantuns. Examples as the following:

| Anak beruk berebut kuntum, | Anak beruk mencuri pinang, |
| Ditampar musang lari meraung; | Disergah orang jatuh berdebam; |
| Awak gemuk kentut berdentum, | Awak gemuk mandi telanjang, |
| Gemparlah orang seisi kampung. | Disangka orang badak berendam. |
| (Young macaques fighting for flower bud, | (Young macaque stole a betel-nut, |
| Slapped by a fox ran off howling; | Fell off when surprised; |
| You fatty with a booming fart, | You fatty bathing in the raw, |
| Causing havoc throughout the hamlet.) | People thought you were a hippo.) |

| Anak beruk menari-nari, | Anak beruk memaki tikus, |
| Disergah musang masuk belukar; | Bulu berdiri muka pun garang; |
| Awak gemuk tegak menari, | Awak gemuk berbini kurus, |
| Rumah goyang orang pun gempar. | Sayulah hati orang memandang. |
| (Young macaques a-dancing, | (Young macaque berating a mouse, |
| Ran into thickets frightened by a fox; | Hair on ends, face frightening; |
| You fatty stood up to dance, | You are fat with a skinny wife, |
| Shaking the house, people freak out.) | Saddened are the hearts of those watching.) |

| Anak beruk duduk menjerat, | Anak beruk mencuri pinang, |
| Kepala tunduk mengintai cicak; | Disergah orang jatuh berdebam; |
| Awak gemuk masuk ke helat, | Awak gemuk mandi telanjang, |
| Di mana duduk lantai berderak. | Disangka orang badak berendam. |
| (Young macaque setting a snare, | (Young macaque stole a betel-nut, |
| Head bent watching a ghekko; | Fell off when surprised; |
| You fatty when you enter a helat, | You fatty bathing in the raw, |
| Where you sit the floor will creak.) | People thought you were a hippo.) |

(H. Tenas Effendy, 2005:2)

The quatrains above are humourous pantuns composed to tease the fat or the obese. Consistent with the sound, “beruk” (monkey) has been chosen as the clue for “gemuk” (fat) and each dictions chosen in the clue is consistent with the characteristics of the sturdy “beruk” itself, so that not only do the sounds rhyme but the meaning
in the clue is also suitable and not ungrammatical. Clearly ruthless or crude jokes did exist in past societies, but because the words were arranged so meticulously and the teasing appears crude, it could still be delivered in a natural, unforced way and accepted as mere teasing. For example, when teasing “Awak gemuk kentut berdentum, Gemparlah orang seisi kampung”, (meaning: You fatty with a booming fart, Causing havoc throughout the hamlet) if delivered directly in prose as in the translation, would surely offend the fat, but when delivered in the form of pantun, even the person teased would surely laugh along.

Besides teasing the skinny or the obese, humour in pantuns are also used to take a jab at liars, as for example in the following:

*Panau berdebu laksana kurap,*  
*Makin kikis, semakin larap;*  
*Orang bida’ah tak boleh harap,*  
*Bising hingar tak terkerlap.*

(The *panau* is scabby like mange,  
The more you scratch the worse it gets;  
A liar you cannot depend on,  
All talk will come to naught.)


*Kalau bertingkir jangan bertinggong,*  
*Kain charek di tepi ponggong;*  
*Habis fikir jangan bohong,*  
*Salah jawab kena rempong.*

(If you are *bertingkir*, don’t sit on your haunches,  
For your skirt is torn at the hip;  
When out of ideas do not make up stories,  
One wrong answer and you are done for.)

(R.J. Wilkinson & R.O. Winstedt, 1961:159)

Pantuns that tease people who like to deceive are embedded with diction which has negative connotations in the clue. Ringworm and skin irritations are skin afflictions which are disliked by Malay society because it would humiliate the sufferer. People who suffer from ringworm and skin irritation are deemed lazy, unclean and useless. The clue is built up from words that do not sound pleasant because the actual message is negative. Although the pantun is crafted in the form of a joke, the message is profound, portraying the character of pathological liars,
cheats, slanderers and gossip mongers who carry tales hither and thither with no credibility. “Bising hingar tak terkelap” means that the mischief-making of the liar brings discomfort to the persons cheated. Likewise with the pantun that followed, this reminds people not to lie so that they won’t be in trouble later on.

Sarcasm were also directed at religious leaders. The cynical jabbing in joke form actually aims at chiding those who were religious but still indulged in activities which were forbidden by religion. For example, as in the pantun below:

 Api-api bergigi dua,  
 Terletak di dulang gedang;  
 Tuan haji berjudi juga,  
 Tergadai serban yang gedang.

(Firefly with two fangs,  
 Alighted on a big tray;  
 The haji who gambles,  
 Stands to lose his huge turban.)

(Rogayah A. Hamid & Jumaah Illias (eds.) 2006)

The pantun indirectly shows that everybody has the capacity for wrongdoing in this world, with no regards to whether they are educated or not. The choice of words in the pantun, such as “haji” (the title for one who had performed the Haj) and “serban” (turban, as worn by a haji) are associated with the pious. Nonetheless, it is somewhat difficult to forgive felony committed by someone educated. In a subtle manner and jokingly, the expression “Tergadai serban yang gedang” is used to show that gambling is a heinous crime, especially if committed by an educated person. Another example of sarcasm for such an educated person is as shown in the following pantun:

 Baik-baik belayar malam,  
 Arus deras karangnya tajam;  
 Cari-cari mualim yang faham,  
 Di situ banyak kapal tenggelam.

(Be careful when sailing at night,  
 The current is swift, the corals sharp;  
 Search for a learned mualim,  
 For there have sunk many a ship.)

(Illadam, 2008)
The pantun above ridicules people with religious knowledge that are sought after by the mass and brings nothing but bewilderment. "Mualim" is the word referring to the pious or the alim person, the person steeped in religious knowledge. Usually an alim person is one with knowledge but they could also bring harm to people. Even though the “mualim yang faham” (the one with knowledge and understanding) has been found, it is there that many a ship had sunk, showing that it is there too, that many a soul had been led astray. The sarcasm actually is aimed at the religious who wrongly teach their mass.

Karena ayam lupakan taji,
Banyaklah musang menahan jerat;
Karena imam lupakan kaji,
Banyaklah orang kerja maksiat.

(Because the cock its spurs forgot,
Many a fox set out to ensnare it;
Because the imam learn and forgot,
Many a person indulge in vice.)

(H. Tenas Effendy, 2005:19)

The above pantun is a jab at the imam who is deemed to be at the root of the vice around him. The imam, being the religious leader ought to be involved and interested only in things related to religion. However, because the imam had forgotten his duties and responsibilities, the community he was supposed to lead was neglected and had fallen away, indulging into all kinds of impieties. This pantun shows that everybody has his/her own duties and responsibilities which should be fulfilled.

Satirical pantuns also come in couplets. Below is the example of the jab at the sloth who hates work:

Pucuk leban gading gajah,
Kerja segan makan gagah.

(Leban shoots and elephant ivory,
To work reluctant, to eat you are a glutton.)

(Zainal Abidin Bakar, 1984:91)

The pantun above sketches the picture of someone lazy but a big eater. The diction is perfect for the rhyming couplet. Both clue and message has a similar rhythm. The message to be delivered is clear. Couplets, too, are used to tease those who like to pretend, for example:

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Banyaklah musang menahan jerat;
Karena imam lupakan kaji,
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Kura-kura dalam perahu,
Pura-pura tak tahu.

(The terrapin is in the perahu,
[You are] pretending not to know.)

Sudah gaharu cendana pula,
Sudah tahu bertanya pula.

(First gaharu then sandalwood,
You know but you still ask questions.)

(Zainal Abidin Bakar, 1984:135)

The choice of the words “kura-kura” (terrapin/tortoise) and “perahu” (small boat) in the clue shows that Malays are very aware of their surrounding. Perahu is the traditional form of water transportation used by Malays, and consistent with “perahu” that always float in water is the similitude of the “kura-kura” or terrapin, the most accurate diction. Likewise with the use of “gaharu” (agalloch eaglewood) and “cendana” (sandalwood) that compliments each other. The above pantun banter at one who acts or pretend to not knowing the happenings around them. Sometimes the pretence is used as an excuse to protect them from being accused of wrongdoing or sometimes to avoid being involved in any issue or matter.

The sarcasm in humourous pantuns clearly shows just how vigilant traditional Malays are in their diction and respectful towards others. Sometimes the sarcasm would be delivered by merely uttering the clue wording and people could already understand the whole implication even without the whole pantun being uttered. The phrase “Kura-kura dalam perahu” (terrapin in the boat), for example, is sufficient to convey the meaning, even without saying “Pura-pura tak tahu” (pretending not to know). Indirectly in this way, those mocked will get the sarcasm though delivered jokingly. Choosing familiar words makes every pantun composed easy to understand. It does not matter whether the pantun is couplet or quatrain; mockery expressed humorously goes to show that Malays have high values and a noble character.

Pantuns discussed above are pantun forms that reveal concrete thoughts which are easily understood. Every form and diction is easily comprehended by the listener. There are also forms of humour pantuns which are meant as a jest, composed so creatively and abstractly which are rather difficult to comprehend. Example as per the pantun below:

Tinggi bukit gunung Ma’bambar,
Tempat bilal menaikkan khatib;
Petang semalam mendapat khabar,
Gunung Rembau digonggong pipit.

(Where the bilal placed the khatib;
Last evening received the news,
Rembau Mountain was by a sparrow snatched.)


It is rather difficult to interpret this pantun. The diction seems to reflect humour, but the presentation seems to be a sarcasm that is difficult to fathom. The pantun seems to be an abstract way of mockery with reference to unexpected occurrence. The lines “Petang semalam mendapat khabar, Gunung Rembau digonggong pipit” show two matters related to an event that are totally impossible to happen. Such indirect jabs could only be understood by those mocked should something unexpected had happened and things that happened are something not expected. Likewise with the following pantun:

Tarik api di dalam rabok,
Rabok berisi katang-katang;
Api menyala di dalam lubok,
Ikan bermain di tengah padang.

(Light up a fire in the rabok,
Rabok filled with katang-katang;
Flames a-leaping in the lubok,
Fish a-jumping in the middle of the field.)


The pantun above is a symbolic pantun. The choice of words in the pantun is so creative, comparing an impossible event with whatever or whoever is to be mocked. The diction is pleasantly funny, but contains within it such depth of meaning.

Humour and Teasing in Pantuns

The pantun functions as a medium for teasing amongst Malays. The elements of humour fitted into pantuns can be divided into riddles and teasing. Most of the teasing pantuns are composed for specific age groups. The riddle pantuns are directed more at children and youth, while the teasing pantuns are for adults and youth. The teasing pantuns are usually in couplets and quatrain.
In couplets for children we can see that the sounds and rhythm chosen are somewhat childish. For example:

*Pat pat siku lipat,*  
*Sita cepat dia dapat.*  
(Pat pat elbow is bent,  
To the swift will get the grant.)

*Pat pat nya,*  
*Sita dapat dia punya.*  
(Pat pat nya,  
finders keepers.

*Kong kong kak,*  
*Nak dukung pada kakak.*  
(Kong kong kak,  
Want big sister to carry me.)  
(Md Ali bin Bachik, 2003:180)

*Dik dik doh,*  
*Budak cerdik kena bodoh.*  
(Dik dik doh,  
The smart is outsmarted.)

*Ngak ngak si,*  
*Gigi rongak tinggal gusi.*  
(Ngak ngak si,  
Teeth all gone, only gums left.)  
(Zainal Abidin Bakar, 1983:89)

The clue in couplets above is not made up of complete words but of melodic syllables instead. This indicates that there is a possibility that these pantuns were composed by children. However this requires more in-depth research since in the world of Malay pantuns, the original authors are as yet unknown. The couplets above are composed for entertainment and for children to jest around, besides making fun of whomever it was who became the subject of the tease. For example, “*Gigi rongak tinggal gusi*” is used to tease those who have lost their milk teeth and are therefore toothless (*gigi rongak*) with only their gums.
left (tinggal gusi), while “Budak cerdik kena bodoh” (the smart kid is outsmarted) is probably used to tease the kid who claims he/she is smart but who has been outwitted. The pantun “Pat pat siku lipat, Siapa cepat dia dapat” is the lyric to a song which is sung in a traditional Malay game somewhat like “musical chair” where players try to grab an object as they sing to the lyric of the song.

The diction in this couplet for children uses rhythmic syllables chosen to rhyme with the message to be delivered. The choice of these similar phonic syllables enhances the rhythm and exhibits the fun-loving nature of children. Humourous pantuns for children also come in quatrain. It is usually used in lullabies, or in songs used as lullabies, or they might even be sung by children at play. As for example:

**Buai laju-laju,**
*Sampai negeri Cina,*
*Apa dalam baju,*
*Sekuntum bunga Cina.*

(Swing high swing,
Till you reach China;
What is in you blouse,
A bud of Gardenia.)

**Pok amai amai,**
*Belalang kupu-kupu;*
*Tepuk adik pandai,*
*Malam upah susu.*

(Pok amai amai,
Locusts and butterflies;
You know how to clap baby,
Tonight you’ll be rewarded with milk.)

**Susu lemak manis,**
*Santan kelapa muda,*
*Adik jangan nangis,*
*Emak nak buat kerja.*

(The milk is sweet and creamy,
The juice of young coconut,
Baby don’t you cry,
Your mother has lots to do.)

The pantuns above are songs that children sing when they are having fun teasing each other, and are also used as lullabies. The choice of words made it fit with the melody. These pantuns have also
been adapted into songs sung by popular singers as children's song. In fact this type of pantun is still sung even to this day. Nevertheless, a holistic exposure is necessary so that pantun in such forms could be preserved.

Besides teasing and fun pantuns, humourous pantuns for children also come in the form of riddles. Riddle pantuns are used not only for entertaining children but also to encourage them to think more creatively and profoundly. Examples are the pantuns below:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Pak Itam Pak Utih,} \\
\text{Sekerat hitam sekerat putih.}
\end{align*}\]

(Pak Itam Pak Utih, Half black half white.)

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Buah cermai tiang batu,} \\
\text{Pemandu ramai penumpang satu.}
\end{align*}\]

(The cermai and a stone pillar, The drivers many the passenger but one.)

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Pak pong Pak Mustafa,} \\
\text{Luar tepung dalam kelapa.}
\end{align*}\]

(Pak pong Pak Mustafa, Flour outside candied coconut inside.)

(Md Ali Bachik, 2003:181)

The three pantuns above are riddle pantuns which require children to think of suitable answers. The children of today would probably find it difficult to guess the correct answers. For Malay eldest, riddles like these would not be difficult to find their answers.

Besides being pantuns for children, couplets are also used by youths to tease each other. Examples are as in the pantuns below:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Pinggan tak retak nasi tak dingin,} \\
\text{Engkau tak hendak aku tak ingin.}
\end{align*}\]

(If the plate had not cracked, the rice would not have gone cold, You don't want me, I can be cold.)

(Zainal Abidin Bakar, 1984:91)

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Dangdut keladi wawa,} \\
\text{Siapa kentut kahwin Cina tua.}
\end{align*}\]
The couplet above use words that is simple and unpretentious. The poet uses the expression “Pinggan tak retak, nasi tak dingin” as clue to the message “Engkau tak hendak, aku tak ingin” being the words of someone who grumbles and let her/his feelings out humourously. Clue and message are united in attuned rhythm. Teasing which uses pantuns such as this clearly shows that traditional Malay society places great importance on manners and courtesy. Pointing a finger at someone who farted is also done through a pantun, so as to save the culprit from embarrassment. The poet meticulously chose his words to tease the person who farted good-naturedly, not maliciously.

However, pantun is also used by Malay society in an extreme fashion, by putting in lewd, vulgar elements. Matters pertaining to the sexual act are not unfamiliar in the lives of human beings. Malay society of today is more open in discussing sexual matters. Traditional Malay society, however, used pantuns to joke about rather lewd, vulgar matters, such as shown in the examples below:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Anak buaya mudik ke hulu,} \\
\text{Nampak sedikit tulang ridipnya;} \\
\text{Anak dara duduk di pintu,} \\
\text{Nampak sedikit hujung teteknya.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Young crocodile going upriver
Its ridip bone is visible;
The virgin sitting in the doorway,
Catch a glimpse of her nipples.)

(R.J. Wilkinson & R.O Winstedt, 1961:2)

The pantun above is one that can stimulate lust even though the feelings are poured out in pantun form. Since traditional Malay society was so careful in letting out their feelings, the pantun was composed so that whatever was intended to be expressed could be understood. The diction in the clue, viz., “Anak buaya mudik ke hulu, Nampak sedikit tulang ridipnya” is sufficient for the message intended. When coupled with the actual message, the expression “anak dara” (virgin) itself points to lasciviousness, especially in the presence of the expression “hujung teteknya” (referring to nipples, teats, or tits) showing clearly the bawdry to come, which however, is still well-controlled and not too
extreme. This, as compared to the pantun below, which clearly shows unbridled lust:

Tanam padi di Bukit Jeram,
Tanam keduduk atas batu;
Macam mana hati tak geram,
Menengok tetek menolak baju.

(Planting rice on Jeram Hill,
Rhododendrons on the rock;
However could my heart keep still,
Seeing her breasts beneath her frock?)

(R.J. Wilkinson & R.O Winstedt, 1961:2)

The poet seems unable to control his emotions, but blurting it out openly is something inconsistent with eastern customs. When the right and suitable words are put together in a pantun, the subject appears as a joke. Even so, traditional Malay society takes this pantun as not of their liking because it deemed to lower another’s dignity or self worth. There are also pantuns dealing with the sexual relations of man and woman which also contain vulgar/lewd elements. For example the pantun below:

Anyam sumpun kelarai berdiri,
Mari tukar sebilah parang;
Jangan usik kopek kami geli,
Hak bawah saya tak larang.

(Weaving the sumpun kelarai standing,
Come swap a machete;
Don’t fondle my breasts for I am ticklish,
What’s down there I do not worry.)

(Harun Mat Piah, 1989:182)

The pantun above is probably used by the poet when in the company of a married couple. It is unthinkable that the pantun was used by traditional society in public; the message, “Jangan usik kopek kami geli,” which translates into “Do not fondle my breasts for I am ticklish” and “Hak bawah saya tak larang” which translates into “What’s down there I do not worry” is so blatantly vulgar. The intimacy between husband and wife is not something to be made public, especially when the diction
clearly exhibits elements of lust and blatant sensuality in them, as also in the pantun below:

\[
\begin{align*}
Di \text{ mana kuang bertelur?} \\
\text{Di atas lata di ruang batu;} \\
Di \text{ mana abang nak tidur?} \\
\text{Di atas dada di ruang susu.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Where does the argus build its nest? 
   Between two rocks, the fall above. 
   My love, where do you wish to rest? 
   Between your breast always, my love.)

(Zainal Abidin Bakar, 1984:102)

The first line of the above pantun is a question, asking "Di mana kuang bertelur?" chosen for its suitability in rhyme and meaning to the third line, "Di mana abang nak tidur?" The suitability of the question form creates rhyming that is pleasant. The meaning too is conveyed so clearly.

**Jokes and Advice in Pantuns**

In humorous pantuns we can find element of advise, reminder and guide for people to go about their daily lives. Malays like to advice through pantuns, because pantuns can guide and teach in an indirect manner, without embarrassing people. This clearly shows how refined were the manners of Malays who still sought to avoid embarrassing or hurting people when delivering censures or advice. The pantuns chosen for discussion are of the quatrain.

The advice element in the humourous pantun below is a sermon meant for religious practise in Malay lives. The *bilal* plays an important role in the management of mosques; at times he also has to play the role of *imam*, to lead people in prayers, but his main role is in reciting the *azan* when it’s time to pray. *Bilal’s* important role is sketched below in the form of a humourous pantun.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Karena tugal disangka antan,} \\
\text{Banyaklah orang tidak ke ladang;} \\
\text{Karena bilal lupakan azan,} \\
\text{Banyaklah orang tidak sembahyang.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Because the plow was mistaken for the pestle, 
   Many farmers did not go down to the fields;
Because the *bilal* forgot the *azan*,
Many people did not perform the prayers.)

(H.Tenas Effendy, 2005:19)

The diction here is of particular interest. The use of the terms “*tugal*” (a dibble) and “*antan*” (a pestle) in the clue is interesting, as it contributes to the humour in the pantun. Since people mistook the plow for the pestle, they did not go down to the padi fields to plow the land. *Tugal* is a wooden staff with a sharpened end, used to plow and to dig holes for planting paddy. The pestle is used for pounding paddy to ease the dehusk grains process.

This humourous pantun pays particular attention to that aspect of Malay life which emphasizes that *azan* (Muslim call to prayers) must be called as soon as it is time for obligatory prayers to be performed. Therefore, when a *bilal* forgets to call the *azan*, it somewhat becomes a quip. Actually there is a point in this funny pantun. Although the matter is trivial to some people, the fact is that *azan* has a big role in encouraging and persuading people to perform their prayers in the mosque especially as a congregation.

If the humourous pantun above had demonstrated the role of the *bilal* in calling people to prayers, the following pantun describes the role of *imam* in the lives of Malays. The role of *imam* is described lightly as in the pantun below:

*Karena ayam lupakan taji,*
*Banyaklah musang menahan jerat;*
*Karena imam lupakan kaji,*
*Banyaklah orang kerja maksiat.*

(Because the cock its spurs forgot,
Many a fox set out to ensnare it;
Because the *imam* learn and forgot,
Many a person indulged in vice.)

(H.Tenas Effendy, 2005:19)

The clue above clearly displays the humourous aspects about the cockerel that forgot its spurs and therefore allowing the fox a free rein to snare it. The diction chosen are of use, “*ayam*” (cockerel) with “*taji*” (spurs) and “*musang*” (fox) with “*jerat*” (snare). The appropriateness of the diction makes the clue interesting. The message in the two lines reminds people of the big role the *imam* plays in persuading people to be virtuous and charitable. The consequence of the *imam* forgetting his role and responsibility in preaching is no light matter.
The choice of the word “kaji” (study) in the third line shows that the poet is aware that imams play an important role in society. This is supported by Tenas Effendy (2005:91): “For those elderly people who are illiterate, the sermonising pantuns and pantuns with homespun wisdom and advice are memorised and learnt, till the essence of the noble values are grasped, which is deemed as ‘studying’ of religious knowledge and teachings”. The “lesson” value of humourous pantuns is obvious in encouraging people to practise virtuous values in their daily lives.

The roles of pious such as the imam and the religious teacher is also protruding in the following humourous pantun:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ujung\ tiang\ diberi\ tanggam, \\
Pecah\ sedikit\ tiangnya\ miring; \\
Untung\ malang\ menjadi\ imam, \\
Salah\ sedikit\ orangpun\ bising. \\
(\text{The\ pillar\ ends\ are\ given\ extensions,} \\
\text{A\ slight\ crack\ will\ tilt\ the\ pillars;} \\
\text{Unfortunate\ is\ he\ who\ becomes\ an\ imam,} \\
\text{A\ slip\ he\ makes\ and\ people\ will\ be\ uproarious.})
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Ujung\ tiang\ diberi\ simpai, \\
Elok\ caranya\ tiang\ kan\ kuat; \\
Untung\ malang\ menjadi\ lebai, \\
Pendek\ doanya\ orang\ mengumpat. \\
(\text{The\ pillar\ end\ is\ given\ notches,} \\
\text{If\ well\ placed,\ the\ pillar\ stands\ sturdy;} \\
\text{Unfortunate\ is\ he\ who\ becomes\ lebai,} \\
\text{If\ his\ supplication\ is\ not\ long\ enough\ he\ will\ be\ maligned.})
\end{align*}
\]

(H.Tenas Effendy, 2005:35)

The first lines in the couplets above, i.e., “Ujung tiang diberi tanggam” (ujung tiang means the end of pillars) and “Ujung tiang diberi simpai” show a repetition except for the last word of each line which is changed. “Tanggam” (wooden extensions into which are cut notches so that the joints will be closely fitted and strong) in the first line of the first stanza becomes “simpai” (rings made from rattan) in the first line of the second stanza. The change has been effected to provide rhyme for the third line of each stanza. The message implicit in the humourous pantuns is that the pious in society must watch their behaviour so as to be role models and educate society and impart noble values.
Teachings of family life could also be found in humorous pantuns. Certainly family life would not be hassle-free, mistakes are made and couples will fight. In this case, the humorous pantun will deliver message in indirect fashion. The following excerpt illustrates this:

Untuk apa ber pagar rapat,
     Supaya tidak dimasuki babi;
Untuk apa belajar silat,
     Supaya tidak dibodohi laki.

(Why put up a close fence,
     So wild hogs will not trespass;
Why take up the silat,
     So by your husband you will not be bullied.)

(H.Tenas Effendy, 2005:35)

The above pantun clearly shows the elements of humour especially in the message embedded in the last two lines. The poet deliberately suggests wife to take up silat (Malay martial arts) training to fend off abuse by husband. The choice of “laki” (referring to husband) rather than the normal, polite “suami” indicates certain terseness in the reminder. The message actually contained an implicit reminder for wives, which not only advises wives to take up silat for self defence purposes, but the word “silat” also portrays a deep and hidden meaning. The concealed advice is the importance for wives to be educated. Knowledge is vital in life and in marriage.

Joke pantuns on marriage life also takes on choosing husbands. In the pantun below, clearly women are advised on how to choose their partner:

Ujung tiang diikat besi,
     Supaya tidak dimakan rayap;
Untung malang mendapat laki,
     Telinga pekak badan berkurap.

(The pillar end is wrapped in iron,
     So by the rayap it will not be eaten;
So unlucky to get a husband,
     Deaf of hearing and a mangy body.)

In writing, the pantun above tells the sad story of an unfortunate wife who gets a husband with unsightly skin infection and also deaf. The choice of the diction “kurap” and “pekak” sound funny when the poet delivers the pantun verbally. The diction of “laki” is also used to add
terseness to the message because as mentioned earlier, this term is crude when compared to the diction “suami”. Nonetheless, there is also an implicit meaning in the pantun. The pantun actually imparts a much more profound reminder, telling women to choose their future husbands according to certain criteria. In Islam there is a guideline to those of the faith in matters of choosing life partners, that is, before a family is set up. Islam determines that great considerations are to be made in choosing spouses to ensure a good life. The Prophet forbids the use of beauty and wealth as crucial yardsticks in choosing a wife, instead one must choose someone who is religious. The Prophet decreed thus (as related by Ibn Majah):

‘Marry not women for their beauty. Maybe the beauty is what will ruin the life. Do not marry them for riches, maybe the riches will make them cruel. But marry them on religious bases. A black slave, with thick lips but who is religious, is better.’


Besides guidelines on married life for husbands and wives, advices on the relationship amongst in-laws are squeezed into humourous pantuns. Many complaints are heard about in-law problems, even in the old times. Humourous jokes recommend that in-laws maintain a harmonious relationship with one another. The following pantun delivers this message:

_Elok hari bawa berburu,_  
_Dengan berburu banyaklah daging;_  
_Eloklah mertua bisu,_  
_Dengan menantu tidak menengking._

(On a good day go hunting  
By hunting the meat will pile up;  
Better for the mother-in-law to be dumb,  
To her daughter-in-law she will not shout.)

_Elok hari bawa berunding,_  
_Jangan menunggu bala meletus;_  
_Eloklah hati mertua sumbing,_  
_Dengan menantu tertawa terus._

(On a good day we can negotiate,  
Do not wait for disaster to erupt;  
Better for the mother-in-law to be sumbing,  
So to her daughter-in-law she’ll appear always laughing.)

(H.Tenas Effendy, 2005:15)
The two first lines, the clue, “Elok hari bawa berburu” and “Elok hari bawa berunding” in both stanzas of the pantun above show the element of repetition. Only the diction “berburu” (to hunt) has been changed to “berunding” (to negotiate) to make the clue rhyme with the messages, respectively. The humour element is seen when the pantun suggests that a mother/father-in-law should be mute so as not to shout at their son/daughter-in-law. A similar form of humour is displayed when the pantun suggests that it would be better for the parents-in-law to be disfigured with a cleft palate, so that they would appear to be smiling all the time to the daughter/son-in-law. Behind this rather gross humour there is a platitude to be delivered. The poet is suggesting for these parties to keep a harmonious relationship, so that there won’t be untoward happenings such as quarrels and what not. To keep their relationship harmonious, in-laws should always be tolerant and make allowances for one another.

Advice to couples to be faithful to their marriage vows is also put forward in humourous pantuns. For example the pantun below:

Karena beruk duduk melukah,
     Banyaklah kijang datang mengintai;
Karena datuk tertangkap basah,
     Banyaklah orang bercerai-berai.

(Because the macaque sits feet wide apart,
    Many a deer had come to peep;
Because the datuk had been caught in the act,
    Many a marriage had been torn asunder.)

(H.Tenas Effendy, 2005:21)

The consequence of bowing too much to his/her lust would cause someone to suffer great shame. The choice of the term “duduk melukah” (to sit with legs wide apart) implies the hidden meaning of the act of “bermukah” (or “committing illicit sexual intercourse”) that the poet wished to convey. Because of the indiscretion, a datuk was caught in the act, and the tragedy sparked divorces. The diction “datuk” has multiple meanings behind it. Datuk could mean an elderly man with grandchildren, a grandfather, or someone with the title of “Datuk”. The consequences of the infidelity of the datuk are enormous, with the power of breaking up marriages, whether between the datuk and his wife or between that of his lover and her spouse. This is a reminder for society to avoid illicit affairs which in the end will severe the marriage vows between husbands and wives.
Conclusion

Humour in the Malay pantun is composed for a variety of reasons. Besides being used to kid around, jokes in pantuns show how traditional Malay thinking places such importance on manners and courtesy when delivering satire, jokes, teaching, advice and all kinds of lessons in life using flora and fauna as sources of inspiration. The diction in humourous pantun shows clearly the creativity of the Malay community in composing pantun in a natural manner which could bring about public awareness whether explicitly or implicitly. The pantun forms composed come with suitable rhymes and pleasant sounds, no matter whether they are couplet, quatrain or with longer verses.

Translated by Hasnah Ibrahim

Bibliography


