
PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AS REPRESENTED IN MALAY PROVERBS

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Abstract

Proverbs have been generally defined as self-contained, pithy traditional expressions with didactic content and fixed poetic form. These traditional expressions reflect the traditional beliefs and prejudices of a community (Norrick 1985: 28), the world view or the *weltanschauung* of the community. Proverbs therefore provide an insight about a people and its culture. More importantly, from the perspective of this paper, the proverbs of a specific speech community are seen to mirror the attitudes and value systems of the community. This focus of this paper is on a collection of Malay proverbs on child rearing. About sixty proverbs collated from seven (7) sources are examined to determine how the Malays of Malaysia perceive the role of parenting and the duties of children towards their parents and siblings. These were categorised according to the major themes that arose from the data. As proverbs generally consist of abstract comparisons to object/s and or event/s a secondary objective of the paper was to determine and analyze the kinds of imagery used in these proverbs.

Introduction and Aim of Study

There is a close connection between language and thought. Sapir (1949) argues that what we see and hear is a reflection of the language habits of our community. Language is but a guide to our cultural norms. Therefore, as a mirror of culture, proverbs are an efficient linguistic means to express the ideals and values of a speech community.

Proverbs are expressions of wisdom acquired through reflection, experience; observation and general knowledge (see Norrick 1985). They address themselves to many themes and areas of life and knowledge. They are very concentrated in the sense that they put a lot of thoughts, ideas, reflections, experiences, observations, knowledge and even world views, into a few words. They are intimately related to the culture of a given society. Discussing for instance Arab proverbs it has been said that they depict a negative image of woman, "Portrayals of women in popular proverbs serve as a barometer by which we can measure the status and role of women in Arab society," writes Nashwan (2000). Nashwan argues that proverbs are important "weapons" in the man's hand within a "patriarchal society. In a society governed by the male, man uses proverbs to justify his deeds..."

Sri Delima, a note bilingual columnist, says talking in Malay is like walking on a tightrope. If one is careless when speaking, people will assume one is impolite. To quote her:

Bercakap dalam bahasa Melayu samalah seperti berjalan di atas tali. Silap cakap anda dikira kasar dan kurang ajar, iaitu anggapan yang menyentuh nama baik ibu bapa anda.

(Sri Delima, 1981:29).

Proverbs, tend to advise and are seen in traditional society as means of setting regulations in the absence of law. In Malay culture, advice is given covertly and not overtly (Asmah, 1990. Jamaliah 2000. Jariah and David, 1996). Politeness can be noted in the Malay norm of speaking indirectly and proverbs are an ideal medium for oblique messages, for practising diplomacy and tact and thus "saving" the recipient's face. Norazlina Mohd Kiram (2002) discussing proverbs, says they contain many lessons and their use reflects the politeness of the Malay community.

The intended direct (informing, claiming etc.) and indirect (advising, recommending, warning etc) illocutionary force of proverbs serves as an ethical mechanism for regulating human behavior and enhancing social control (see also David, 1996 on Sindhi and Tamil proverbs regarding mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships). Proverbs are, therefore, ideal for giving parenting tips and advice to parents and also to inform children of what is expected of them.

The Malay language is rich in proverbs and by investigating this literary genre we hope to understand the social relationship between Malaysian Malay parents and children and the duties and responsibilities of parents and also children vis a vis each other. We are not able in this study to go into the depth entailed in all Malay proverbs on all issues of parenthood, which also inevitably involve the perception of women (see also, David and Aishah 2001, on the perception of women as seen in Malay proverbs). Examining and quoting some of the proverbs will give us a working picture of what the proverbs say about the role and responsibility of parents and that of children.

In summary then, since the real world is, to a large extent, consciously or unconsciously built up on the culture and language habits (which includes proverbs) of a community, this paper will discuss Malay proverbs with a view to determining how the role of parents is perceived in Malay society and what the role of children is. A secondary aim of the paper is to determine and analyse the imagery used in these proverbs.

Methodology

The proverbs and rhymed verses were sourced from seven (7) sources. Only proverbs which had some relevance to child upbringing were selected. A corpus consisting of about sixty (60) items were taken from the following books:

List 1: Sources Used.

1. Abdullah Hussain. 1990. *Kamus Simpulan Bahasa*. 2nd ed. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka
2. Hamilton, A.W 1959. *Malay Pantuns*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.
3. Hose, F.S. 1933. *Malay Proverbs*. Singapore: Government Printing Office.
4. <http://www.pointpub.com/kampungnet/pantun.html>
5. Ishak Ismail. 1957. *Malay Proverbs: Sayings and Pantuns of Old*. Penang: Sinaran Brothers.
6. Wilkinson, R.J. and R.O Windstedt. 1961. *Pantun Melayu*. Singapore: Malaya Publishing House.
7. Windstedt, Richard. 1981 *Malay Proverbs*. Singapore: Graham Brash.

Analysis of Proverbs Regarding Parenting

The corpus of 60 proverbs sourced from the list of books were analysed and categorised according to first, the duties and responsibilities of parents and

then, the duties of children (see List 2). The proverbs were then further subcategorized according to the main sub-themes which developed under these two major categories.

In order to determine the imagery used the proverbs were again categorized according to animate and inanimate comparisons made.

List 2: Categorisation of Proverbs

1. **Duties of Parents** on the 'proper' and 'accepted' way of bringing up children. This includes the importance of disciplining children and the need to start this disciplining process early.
2. **Duties of Children** also portray children's responsibilities towards their parents and elders and towards siblings and relatives. Qualities children should have, for instance, adaptability, good manners and humility are also discussed.

Below is a list of some notations used in this analysis.

Proverb	(numbered consecutively in the order of appearance)
()	translation
[]	interpretation
<>	

Analysis of Proverbs

A. Advice to Parents

The set of proverbs in this section focuses on the responsibility of parents towards their children. Poetic devices like parallelism, repetition, metaphors and contrast are used in these proverbs to convey both literal and non-literal meanings to assert authority on societal traditions and role relationships. Parents are informed by the proverbs on how to conduct themselves in the parent-child relationship.

1 *Love Child Unconditionally*

Malay children are loved dearly and parents are advised to shower their children with plenty of tender loving care. Proverb 1 describes the importance of children in Malay homes. They are so precious and one must care for them so carefully almost like ensuring that the oil (symbolism is discussed later in this paper) one holds in the palm of one's hands does not spill! All children should be showered with love including children with deformities (Proverb 2). To ignore a deformed child is akin to hurting oneself. The deformed child in Proverb 2 is represented by a sore on one's lips. The extent of parents' love

for their children is illustrated in Proverb 3 which states that trusting your child is better than trusting a stranger. Parents are, however, reminded that each child is to be treated as an individual and they should be sensitive to each child's needs (Proverb 4). We are told that each coconut is different in shape and texture even if they all come from the same stalk. Nature and plants surround the village where the majority of the Malays traditionally lived and where many, still do live. Learning a lesson from the flora and fauna that are found in the village is an effective way of transmitting a message.

Love Child Unconditionally

1. *Ditatang seperti minyak yang penuh* (Like carrying a palmful of oil)
2. *Getiknya puru di bibir* (To be impatient with a sore on one's lips) [To hate one's child because of deformity]
3. *Harapkan anak mata buta sebelah, harapkan orang lain mata buta keduanya* (To trust one's child is blindness in one eye, to trust a stranger is blindness in both)
4. *Nyior setandan tetapi berlain lain jadinya* (A stalk of coconut but each one is different)

2 Discipline Child

However, despite the love that parents should have for their children discipline must be meted. In short, discipline must equally balance love. We are told that loving does not mean being lax and liberal. There are proverbs which inform how the punishment should be meted (Proverbs 5-8) should children misbehave. The nature of the punishment is compared to the gentle way animals chide and correct their young. Parents must be rational and responsible when punishing and must not willfully and without regard hit out at children. Even if the intention is to discipline, the parent must not hurt the child. Therefore, the rod must be carefully and gently used, in the same way that a hen pecks at its offspring, gently but firmly (Proverb 5).

Parents must not abuse their children. In fact, parents can, by abusing their children discredit not only themselves but the entire family. Proverb 8 reminds parents that such an action will bring shame not only to oneself but also the entire family.

Nature of Discipline

5. *Saperti ayam mematak anaknya* (Like a hen that pecks its chick)
6. *Takkan harimau memakan anaknya* (A tiger won't eat its own cub)

7. *Saperti kerbau menanduk anaknya, dengan papar tidak dengan hujungnya* (Like unto a buffalo butting her calf, with mock severity some childish irregularity) [When punishing a child be careful not to cause pain, but only with mock severity in order to discipline the child]
8. *Potong hidong rosak muka* (Who cuts off his nose spoils his face) [A man who abuses his family discredits himself, the whole family is affected by the disgrace of a single member]

Parents are continuously reminded of their role as disciplinarians. It is the parent who is responsible for his child's behavior. Children who are badly behaved are a mere reflection of poor discipline meted by parents who have not disciplined them (Proverb 9, 10). However, the community is advised in a number of non-literal or metaphorical proverbs that any such discipline should start when the children are still young. If discipline is delayed it might be too late to reprimand the children or make them change their ways. Parents who do not realize the importance of moulding their children early will face the following consequences (Proverb 11-13). In Proverb 13 the comparison to the plant world is again made. Such comparisons facilitate understanding as they are easily observable by the Malay community. They are told that if children are not disciplined when young is akin to planting a particular fruit and then getting something different. It is, therefore, important then that parents constantly keep watch of their children's behavior and discipline them while they are still malleable.

Disciplining To Start from an Early Age

9. *Bagaimana bunyi gendang begitulah tarinya* (As the drum beats so goes the dance) [Lax control spells lax observance]
10. *Bolehkah digabus sebelum diasah?* (Can one shine before it is sharpened?) [To have good behaviour, a child needs to be brought up with discipline.]
11. *Lagi kecil tak mahu diubat, sudah terbabang mahu diubat* (When a cut is small one does not treat it, when it is wide-open, one wants to treat it) [A person is allowed to grow up vicious.]
12. *Kecil-kecil lah anak, kalau sudah besar menjadi onak.* (While small is still a child, when grown up they become big thorns.) [Youth is the time for education. It is too late to commence tuition when the pupil is capable of resistance.]
13. *Tanam chempedak tumbuh nangka* (To plant a chempedak {a variety of jack fruit} and find a jack fruit instead) [A bad son of good parents]

3 *Be tolerant: children are but a reflection of their parents*

Apart from educating, training and disciplining their children, parents are reminded to be tolerant and understand that all children do tend to misbehave. Parents must remember that children are a mirror of themselves (Proverbs 14 to 19). As the mould so will the cake be (Proverb 14). Comparisons to the animal and plant worlds are made to press home the point that parents have to be good role models.

Children are a Mirror of Their Parents

14. *Bagaimana acuan begitulah kuehnya* (Whatever the mould so the cakes will be)
15. *Bapa borek anaknya rintik* (Given that the father is spotted, the son will at least be speckled) [Like father, like son]
16. *Rebung tidak jauh dari rumpunnya* (A shoot is not far from a bush of bamboos)
17. *Kemana tumpahnya*
be poured if not on to the rice?) [A child follows his father's example and teaching. If he were not able to do so, where else would he look for a guide?]
18. *Kalau di hulu air nya keroh, tiada dapat tiada di hilirnya pun keroh juga* (If water is turgid at the source, it will certainly be the same lower down) [As a man's parentage is so his own character likely to be]
19. *Saperti ketar*
asks its young to walk straight)

4 *Onerous Responsibilities of Parenthood*

The protective nature of the traditional Malay society emerges in the view held of a daughter. The presence of daughters in a Malay household results in an additional duty for the parents. They must ensure that their daughters are "married off" to a responsible young man of good breeding as illustrated in Proverb 20. The flower (Proverb 20) symbolises a young maiden. In Malay culture marriage, especially of a daughter, is an important duty of a parent to ensure that their daughter gets married and is married well. In fact, Malay parents have many obligations and responsibilities to their children. Such parental responsibilities are so onerous that they age parents (Proverb 21).

Parental Responsibilities: Onerous

20. *Apa guna bunga ditanam jika tidak diberi kumbang menyernya?* (What's the use of planting flowers if not to let the bee visit it?)
 21. *Sa hari berbini se hari berubah fikiran, Sehari beranak sehari tua* (Each day of married life, a day of changed mind, each day of parent-age, a day of aging) [Such is the burden of being a good parent]

5 Role of the Father

Incidentally, these proverbs also tend to emphasize the role of the Malay man. As Malay proverbs tend to portray society from the man's point of view the proverbs are aimed at the father/husband who is considered the chief disciplinarian in a Malay family. It is interesting to note that in Proverb 22 the child and wife are equated, and we are advised that to maintain love between a man and his child and/or a man and his wife, it is important that the man of the family should either let them cry or leave them. Malay women are thus not seen in a favorable light in the proverbs and are put on equal terms as the child. However, it should be noted that the underlying meaning about the treatment of wives is that distance makes the heart grow fonder.

The father or the man in a Malay household has always been the one to carry the responsibility of ensuring the safety of their household (Proverb 23). A man's role is one of the protector. The metaphorical Proverb 23 argues that unless a garden is fenced, wild animals will attack the plants. Similarly, a responsible father should ensure the safety of his family. In short, the father or the man in a Malay household is seen as the person who has to carry the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the household.

Role of Father

22. *Kasihkan anak tangan-tangankan, kasihkan bini tinggal-tinggalkan* (If you love your child beat him a little, if you love your wife leave her once in a while)
 23. *Kalau kebun yang baik tumbuh-tumbuhan maka jikalau tiada dipagar dapat tiada masuklah binatang atau barang sebagainya membinasakanya* (If your garden has good things growing in it, unless you fence it, most assuredly wild animals and such-like will get in and spoil it) [A father and husband's duty is to ensure that all precautions are taken to ensure the safety of the wife and children.]

Malay proverbs emphasize that parents are ultimately responsible for what their children become for children are but a reflection of their parents.

B. Duties and Expectations of a Child

While parents are burdened with responsibility towards their children, children are also required to carry out their duties toward not only their parents but also their siblings. The main theme in the proverbs directed at the children is the importance of maintaining the love within a family and of performing one's duties for family members.

1 Importance of Being Filial and Having Love and Unity within the Family

There are a number of proverbs which remind children they are bonded to siblings and parents, no matter what happens (Proverb 24). Even if quarrels occur, the family unit should remain permanent. Examples from the animal world (Proverb 24), the world of nature (Proverb 25) and the plant world (Proverb 26-27) are used to emphasize this point. The bonding between siblings is so strong and important that they should not do anything which will shame the entire family. We are told in Proverb 25 that slashed water is never severed (similarly, strained relationships between members of a family are but temporary) and in Proverb 27, that siblings are like sugar palms in secondary forest, each having shoots, which due to proximity, may cause friction. The sore in Proverb 28 symbolizes a member of the family and it means that we only make matters worse by picking at the sore i.e. by ill-treating or publicizing the faults of a member of the family. Incidentally, Malay etiquette emphasizes that the faults of members of the family must not be made public and should be solved within the family. Even if quarrels occur, the family unit should remain constant and contained as such misunderstandings are transient (Proverbs 24-27).

Family should be United and Misunderstandings are Short-lived

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| 24. | <i>Carik-carik bulu ayam, lama-lama bercantum juga</i> (No matter how a hen's feather breaks, it will combine eventually) |
| 25 | <i>Air dicencang takkan putus</i> (Slashed water is never severed)[Even after serious quarrels they will be eventually united due to their relationship] |
| 26. | <i>Berkelelahi dihujung batang, berbaik di pangkal batang</i> (To fight at the end of the branch, to be good at the beginning of the branch) [Arguments between siblings are temporary] |
| 27 | <i>Bagai kabong dalam belukar melepaskan puchok masing masing</i> (Like sugar palms in swamp, each putting out shoots which natu- |

rally touch each other and may set up friction) [There may be family discords from time to time but the quarrels are short lived]

28. *Getekkan puru di bibir* (To pick at the sore on your lip)

Malay children are also taught never to forget their parents or the guardians who cared for and loved them when they were young (Proverb 29-30). Loyalty is an important value system rooted in Malay culture. Again, an example is taken from the plant kingdom to make a point. (Proverb 29).

Filial Child

29 *Mayang menolak seludang* (Flowers of the coconut refuse their container) [Do not forget the person who cared for you from young]

30 *Hidup di dunia biar beradat* (Let's live in this world by rules of the old) [It's important to adhere to Malay customs and etiquette.]

2 *Respect for Elders*

Teachers and religious teachers or *ustaz* are usually regarded highly by villagers and are placed usually next, if not on equal terms, with the village head or *penghulu*. The seeking of knowledge is given high premium in the *Al-Quran*, the Holy Book of Islam. Consequently, those who provide knowledge should also be given due respect. Children should respect their elders, including their teachers and mentors (Proverb 31). Children should know their place as they are less experienced and knowledgeable. They should not oppose the decisions made by the parents and elders. In the hierarchical Malay society where age and role relationships have high premium, such advice is not unsurprising.

31 *Kalau kail panjang sejengkal, jangan lautan hendak diduga* (If the fishing rod is only an arm's length, do not attempt to venture the whole sea) [If knowledge is not plentiful, don't go against the others or elders who are more knowledgeable.]

3 *Importance of Education and Perseverance*

Education and knowledge is highly regarded in the Malay community (Proverb 32). Children are informed that good education provides mobility Children are advised to be humble even when they are educated (Proverb 33). Being humble is an important virtue and this we can observe even from the plants (Proverb 33). However, since knowledge is given a high premium children are encouraged to ask for guidance when seeking knowledge (Proverb 34).

Importance of Education

- 32 *Intan salah serudinya*
(Education is more important than birth)
- 33 *Buat ilmu padi, makin berisi makin tunduk, jangan buat ilmu lalang makin lama makin tinggi* (Do as the paddy does, it bends as it gets heavier, do not do as the lalang grass does, the longer it grows, the taller it becomes) [One should be full of learning but one should always be modest]
- 34 *Segan bertanya sesat jalan*
[If you are shy to ask you will lose your way]

It is important to practice and persevere in order to improve and advance one's skills (Proverb 35). In trying and difficult times children are constantly advised to persevere (Proverbs 35-37).

Importance of Perseverance

- 35 *Alah bisa alah biasa* (Practice makes perfect)
- 36 *Busut juga ditimbun anai-anai*
(A hillock can be heaped up by white ants)
[Perseverance can effect great things]
- 37 *Genggam bara api biar sampai jadi arang*
(Hold a burning wood till it becomes charcoal)[Persevere till you succeed]

A concrete object used daily by the farmer in traditional times i.e. the firewood is also used to emphasise the importance of perseverance (Proverb 37)

4 Importance of Friendship

Friendship is valued and children are reminded to find only loyal friends who will be willing to help in times of trouble (Proverb 38). Proverb 38 informs us that the bamboo plant needs the river bank to survive. In the same way, we depend on each other to survive as no man is an island. One should always be loyal to one's friends and work together for in this way the load will be shared and lightened (Proverbs 39-41).

Importance of Friendship

- 38 *Hidup sandar-menyandar umpama aur dengan tebing* (Live helping each other like bamboo that grows along the river bank) [Loyal friends who are always willing to help]
- 39 *Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing* [If it is heavy we shoulder it together, if it is light we carry it together]
- 40 *Bersatu teguh, bercerai runtuh* [United we stand, divided we fall]
- 41 *Ringan sama dijinjing, berat sama dipikul* (Share and share alike for better or for worse)

Children are reminded to befriend people of the same socio-economic standing so that problems are minimised (Proverb 42). This advice is given because having friends from a higher socio-economic background may necessitate conforming to the standards of another group. Mixing with people from the same background is easier for one has similar interests and experiences.

- 42 *Hendak bersahabat cari sama babat*
(When you make a friend seek one of your own class)

5 Importance of Doing Good Deeds

Malay proverbs remind the children that it is important to do good deeds (Proverb 43) for one's good deeds will be remembered even after one is dead (Proverbs 44-46). In transmitting this message Proverb 45 uses an illustration from the animal kingdom, from which the tiger and the elephant, both big and strong, are drawn.

Good Deeds are Remembered

- 43 *Buat baik berpada-pada, buat jahat jangan sekali* (Do good deeds but bad deeds none at all)
- 44 *Hutang emas dapat di bayar hutang budi di bawa mati* [A debt of money may be paid, a debt of kindness is a debt through life]
- 45 *Harimau mati meninggalkan belang*, (A tiger dies leaving his stripes)
Gajah mati meninggalkan tulang (An elephant dies leaving his bones)
Manusia mati tinggalkan nama [A man dies leaving his reputation]
- 46 *Hancur badan dikandung tanah, budi baik dikenang jua*
[Even though one is dead, one's good deeds will be remembered]

Children are also reminded that good deeds and good behavior are a reflection of one's upbringing as illustrated in Proverbs 47 and 48. It is vital that one behaves well. Bad behavior or misconduct mars one's reputation and standing in the society and the reputation of one's community (Proverb 49).

Behaviour Reflects Upbringing

- 47 *Bahasa menunjukkan bangsa* (Proper speech is a good reflection of one's race)
- 48 *Usul menunjukkan asal* (Our origins are shown by our actions)
- 49 *Rosak bangsa kerana laku* (Good breeding is injured by bad conduct)

6 Importance of Being Adaptable

The Malay child is advised to be adaptable and flexible and to do as the Romans do. They should avoid causing inconvenience to others. Again, examples from the animal kingdom (Proverbs 50-52) are taken to make this point.

Importance of Adaptability

- 50 *Masok kawan ayam berkokok* (If you find yourself with a lot of cocks crow)
- 51 *Masok ka dalam kandang kambing mengembek* (If you find yourself in a sheepfold, bleat)
- 52 *Masok ka dalam kandang kerbau menguak* (If you find yourself in a buffalo byre, bellow)
- 53 *Kalau di bawah melompat, kalau di atas menyusup* (If you are below, jump, if above, slide)

Hastiness, quick action without thinking and giving way to one's passions are not advisable for the consequences can be disastrous.

Do not be Hasty

- 54 *Ikut hati mati, ikut rasa binasa* [To give way to one's desire is death, to give way to one's passion is destruction]
- 55 *Biar lambat asalkan selamat* [Better late than never]
- 56 *Padam menyala terek puntong* (Wait till the fire is out before you draw the logs)

7 Keep your Word

In Malay culture, keeping promises or *amanah* is very important and is a reflection of one's honesty. Children are reminded that it is one's duty to keep one's word for once a promise is made it must be kept (Proverbs 57-59). What differentiates man from animals is man's ability to keep promises. In the same way that the buffalo and his tail are an integral part of each other so must a man's promise be an integral part of him (Proverb 59). Like *Hang Tuah*, a Malay legendary figure, Malay children are told that keeping one's word and upholding and respecting the law and the culture of the land where one lives is vital (Proverb 60). Malay children are also taught to be loyal and patriotic (Proverb 61).

Importance of Keeping One's Word

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| 57 | <i>Saperti gading gajah sudah keluar tak dapat dimasukkan balik</i>
(Like elephants tusks, once they have been pulled out you can't put them back) |
| 58 | <i>Kata itu biarlah kota</i> (Let what you say be as reliable as a fort)[Let your word be as good as your bond] |
| 59 | <i>Kalau kerbau dipegang pada talinya, kalau manusia dipegang pada cakapnya</i>
(Buffaloes are held by their cord, Man by their words) |
| 60 | <i>Dimana bumi dipijak, disana langit dijunjung</i> (Whichever land one steps on, there the sky is) [One should follow the culture and law of the land one stays in] |
| 61 | <i>Hujan emas dinegeri orang, hujan batu dinegeri sendiri, Lebih baik negeri sendiri</i> (It may rain gold in a foreign land and stones in your country, but your own country is always better.)[Loyalty and patriotism should lie with in your own country.] |

The list of proverbs provided in the first part of this paper shows that it is not only the parents who should be responsible for their children but that children, too, should have a sense of duty towards parents, siblings and friends, and show respect to their elders. In addition, children should have certain qualities, for instance, humility, honesty, perseverance, flexibility and loyalty. At the same time, they should work towards obtaining a good education.

Symbolism

The form and structure of Malay proverbs are fairly short and concise, and generally use images from everyday life. Such images function to stigmatize

excess behavior or act as indirect moral reprimands or warnings. The proverbs listed in the first part of the paper tend to consist of abstract comparisons or symbols to a concrete object/event. In the traditional Malay world, being an agrarian world, symbols used to signal moral values (values in relation to child upbringing and family relations) in such literary devices as similes, metaphors and personification revolve around flora and fauna. Furthermore, the images projected by the proverbs include not only the animal and plant world but also inanimate objects like oil, water, feathers etc. Such inanimate objects are used in Malay proverbs to make indirect allusions to parental and/or the responsibilities of the child.

As mentioned earlier, it is important to teach children when they are still young. This idea is emphasized by making comparisons to a world that is understood by a farming community. Messages are transmitted through comparisons to images solidly anchored in the world of flora and fauna and also the animal world. Proverbs by “disguising” their message are able to legitimize critical or unpleasant messages.

In the collection of Malay proverbs, one particular symbol that keeps recurring is that of a young bamboo shoot. The bamboo shoot symbolises a child. The emphasis on early moulding of character and personality is made by comparisons to bending or moulding a bamboo shoot. The bamboo shoot symbol is used in the following set of proverbs as reminders to parents to start disciplining children or provide any form of training from an early age (Proverbs 62-65).

Symbol: Bamboo Shoot

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| 62 | <i>Masa rebunglah hendak dilentur jangan dinantikan sampai menjadi aur</i>
(The time to bend a bamboo is when it is still a shoot, don't wait till it has grown into bamboo) |
| 63 | <i>Melentur buluh biarlah dari rebungnya</i>
(Bending a bamboo, start when it is a shoot) |
| 64 | <i>Sedang rebung baik dipatah jadi buluh melupuh jari</i>
(When still a shoot it's easy to break, when it's a bamboo it will just burn your fingers) |
| 65 | <i>Pada tatkala rebung tak dipatah, ketika sudah menjadi aur apa gunanya</i> (If you do not break it while it is a shoot, of what use will it be (for food) when it is a grown bamboo?) [Education must begin when children are young] |

Stereotypical traits of natural species are constantly being made use of to make a point. For instance, in Proverbs 62-65 the Malay farming community

is informed that a shoot is more malleable than a bamboo and therefore one should not wait for it to grow into a bamboo. Proverb 62 advises that it is easier to pluck a bamboo shoot without hurting oneself as compared to uprooting a mature plant. A comparison to known objects makes it easier for the agrarian community to make connections between growing plants and growing children. Both plants and children have to be looked after and nurtured in their infancy.

The importance of remaining true and loyal to friends, a value system emphasized in Malay proverbs, is also symbolized by the bamboo plant. The bamboo grows near the water's edge and the river provides the much needed water for the plant. They are not in conflict but close enough to depend on each other (Proverb 38).

The fact that sibling relations should and must prevail regardless of temporary misunderstandings is also better understood by an agrarian community when comparisons to a known world are made. Other than the bamboo plant, comparisons are made to palm trees which, because they grow in close proximity to each other, inevitably tend to "step on each other's toes." Eventually however, they do grow tall and strong (Proverb 27). At times both plant and animal images are used to send the same message. For instance, we are told that the feather of a hen despite being rumpled can easily be smoothed to revert to its original shape (Proverb 24). Such vivid imagery, taken from a familiar world makes sense and meaning to a farming community when applied and extended to the human condition and relationships.

Important value systems are also indicated by making comparisons to plants. The importance of modesty is compared to the padi plants which though, growing tall and rich, tend to bend (implying modesty) unlike the *lallang* grass which simply grows upright, higher and higher without bending. The padi seed symbolizes the knowledge one gains. With more knowledge one should become more humble, unlike the *lallang* grass (Proverb 33).

Animals also feature in Malay proverbs. The importance of keeping promises is compared to the anatomy of a buffalo. Just like the tail is a fixed part of the buffalo similarly, for man, a promise made must be a promise kept (Proverb 59). An elephant on dying leaves nothing but its skeletal frame. In the same way, a man's reputation lives after him. So it is important that promises are kept (Proverb 45). Incidentally, the same animals i.e. the buffalo and other animals like the hen and the tiger are used to show how to rebuke one's child - lovingly but firmly (Proverbs 5-7).

Symbol: Animal

- 59 *Kalau kerbau dipegang pada talinya, kalau manusia dipegang pada cakap nya* (Buffaloes are held by their cord, Man by their words)
- 45 *Harimau mati meninggalkan belang, Gajah mati meninggalkan tulang* (An elephant when dead leaves his bones behind him)
- 57 *Saperti gading gajah sudah keluar tak dapat dimasukan balik* (Like an elephants tusks, once they have been pulled out you can't put them back into his skin again)
- 5 *Saperti ayam mematuk anaknya* (Like a hen that pecks its chick)
- 6 *Takkan harimau memakan anaknya* (A tiger won't eat its own cub)
- 7 *Saperti kerbau menanduk anaknya, dengan papar tidak dengan hujungnya*
(Like unto a buffalo butting her calf, with mock severity some childish irregularity.) [As a rebuke administered to a child by a dotting parent with mock severity]
- 50 *Masok kawan ayam berkokok* (If you find yourself with a lot of cocks crow)
- 51 *Masok ka dalam kandang kambing mengembek* (If you find yourself in a sheepfold, bleat)
- 52 *Masok ka dalam kandang kerbau menguak* (If you find yourself in a buffalo byre, bellow)

The need to accommodate and adjust to one's larger environment is a necessary piece of advice and children are told that when they are with cocks they crow, with sheep they bleat and with buffaloes they bellow. In other words, when in Rome do as the Romans do (Proverbs 50-52).

Personal qualities like patience and perseverance are important value systems and we can learn from the white ants who painstakingly and patiently build little hillocks (Proverb 36).

Parents must be good role models. We can learn the importance of this by observing the crab who tries to teach her offspring to walk straight (Proverb 19).

Both the animal and agrarian world are seen together in Proverb 23 which advises parents to look after and guard their children for danger always lurks from without if parental supervision and guardianship is missing. This message is given indirectly by comparison to a garden with beautiful and thriving plants. This garden has to be fenced to prevent animals from destroying it (Proverb 23).

In short, implied comparisons to the lifestyle of plants and animals are constantly made in Malay proverbs. These images which permeate Malay proverbs imply that we must learn from the harmonious life-style of both

plants and animals. Apart from plants and animals comparisons are also made to inanimate objects and elements like earth, water, oil, medicine, durians and forts. For instance, the assiduous attention paid by mothers to children is made by a simile. We are told that when holding a palmful of oil one has to be very careful (Proverb 1). Similarly, it is implied that a mother has to be devoted and involved in the upbringing of their children. Oil is an important and precious commodity and has many uses in traditional Malay farming society. In the same way, oil symbolises children who are nurtured with love and discipline who will also bring light and joy to a home. It has to be carefully preserved and not spilled. Similarly, children are a precious commodity and must be as carefully looked after.

The responsibility of maintaining proper conduct of one's own behavior and being a role model for one's child is seen in the argument that if water is turgid at the source it will certainly be turgid further down the river (Proverb 18). Rivers and water are an inherent part of the Malay world view for settlements and villages are located near water. Water is used for daily sustenance, for cooking, drinking etc. Water is a cleanser used for washing, purifying, ablution, etc. Ablution is a very necessary rite in Islamic tradition and the Malays are Muslims. In short, just as water is essential for the padi fields on which their livelihood depends, water is essential for their daily physical and religious life. The comparisons made to turgid water and parents maintaining standards and proper conduct is implicit.

The importance of family ties was seen earlier in the comparisons made to the plant and animal worlds. Family disputes are common but such disputes should not escalate in major discord and dissension. This is seen in the proverbs which have some allusions to water. Apart from the plant and animal images used to make this point, water is also used to make the same point. Water that is slashed is never severed (Proverb 25). Water symbolizes the bond among members of a family. Families may disagree and fight but love overcomes and family ties remain.

The notion that one should mould one's child when they are still malleable and still young, is not only seen in the plant category of the bamboo shoot but also in an indirect comparison to the need for medical care. Parents who do not instill correct values in their children when they are young are like those who although hurt wait for the wound to become huge and gaping before going to the doctor. However, when the wound was minor it was ignored (Proverb 11). Disciplining during the formative years of their children's growth is vital and parents are advised to do so.

Parents who are not vigilant in the upbringing of their children and are poor role models cannot expect their children to be to them what they are not to their children. For one dances according to the beat of the music. Lax control inevitably results in lax observation of rules and expected norms of behavior by children (Proverb 9).

The importance of upholding one's promises seen in the animal category is also seen in the inanimate categorization. Words must be as reliable as forts for words are forts (Proverb 58). Forts were the defence system of the towns in the old days and once these were conquered towns were destroyed. Similarly, though not stated, the implications of not keeping one's promises are disastrous. If one does not keep one's words then one is considered to be untrustworthy by the Malay community.

The value of preserverence by taking examples from things done daily like obtaining and removing firewood is noted. One has to wait till the fire is extinguished before removing any wood (Proverb 56).

Parents are reminded through daily items like kitchenware that our children are but a representation of ourselves. The jelly is formed according to its mould. Yet another symbol from the culinary field is taken to make the same point. Where is the gravy to be poured except on the rice? (Proverb 17). Examples from physical appearances are also used to make this point (Proverb 15). Therefore, again and again examples taken from the natural and physical environment remind Malay parents that they are the role models for their children.

Conclusion

Proverbs are the insignia of cultural identity of a community. The function of proverbs is educative and provides an insight into the culture of its people. Proverbs play a major role in legitimizing critical messages and for a community that has indirectness as one of its major speech norms they are an ideal means of transmitting messages indirectly. The elders of the community use proverbs to tactfully touch on issues that may be too delicate to be mentioned openly and thus save the face of the involved party.

The proverbs illustrate that the main message for Malay parents is that children should be surrounded with love, brought up with discipline and taught to be responsible individuals to the family and community. Parents should strive to be good role models for children are but a mirror image of their parents. Malay children are also told to honour their family - both parents and siblings - and to place them always at the top of their list of responsibilities. As such, any misunderstanding within a family should be resolved. As proverbs are passed on from one generation to another, Malay parents and children stand to benefit from the messages they deliver.

The symbols used to transmit these messages revolve around the flora and fauna, and are easily understood by the traditional agrarian Malay community. However, as more and more Malays move away from the villages to the urban areas the significance of such images and symbols may be lost to new, young, urban Malays.

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