

# **DULMULUK: THE TRADITIONAL DRAMA OF PALEMBANG SOUTH SUMATERA**

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## **Abstract :**

*Artikel ini tentang dulmuluk sebagai drama tradisional dan pementasan seni yang ada di Palembang Sumatera Selatan. Dulmuluk mulai dikenal sejak awal abad 20 sampai sekarang. Penulis tertarik menulis tema ini karena pementasan Dulmuluk berbeda dengan pementasan ketoprak atau ludruk dari daerah Jawa. Dulmuluk hanya menceritakan cerita seorang raja yang bernama Abdul Muluk, sedangkan ketoprak atau Ludruk menceritakan bermacam-macam cerita rakyat atau legenda. Masyarakat Palembang meyakini bahwa cerita Dulmuluk diperkenalkan oleh Raja Ali haji dalam bukunya "Kejayaan Kerajaan Melayu" pada tahun 1845. Buku ini menceritakan sejarah "raja Abdul Muluk". Cerita ini pernah menjadi cerita yang sangat populer di Palembang dan Malaysia. Namun, kepopuleran cerita ini berangsur menghilang. Tulisan ini akan mendiskusikan tentang sejarah dulmuluk, biografi Raja Ali Haji, perkembangan Dulmuluk dan peranannya terhadap kesusastraan Indonesia.*

**Key Word : Dulmuluk, Drama dan Palembang**

## **The History of Dulmuluk**

Dulmuluk is a traditional theatre in Palembang South Sumatera. Palembang. Palembang is renowned as one of the oldest cities in Indonesia. Malay language developed when Islam arrived and brought the Arabic script which was modified for the need of local language, which is called Jawi (Pudji Astuti, 2006).

There is no evidence when Dulmuluk existed in Palembang. Many Indonesian researchers found that Dulmuluk was from the book "Kejayaan kerajaan melayu" which is written in July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1845. Dutch government at that time called this book "Syair Abdul Muluk"(Halim, 2006). The book is written in Malay language. The book tells about King Hindustan whose name Abdul Muluk. He is the son of Abdul Hamid Syah. Abdul Muluk is a smart, wise and handsome King. This book contains Syair or poems which admire the king and send message to the readers how to be a good person (Crayonpedia, n.d).

After ten years since this book had written, Wan Bakar who was merchant from Mecca read this book in front of people in Tanggatak Palembang (now seberang ulu 2). The people are interested in that book and try to find out who the writer is and try to perform it on the stage becoming theatre (Halim, 2006).

According to Rambang Dangku (2008), the Dutch government had two opinions related to the book's author. Van Eysinga said that the author is Raja Ali Haji bin Raja Ahmad and Van de Wall said that the true author is Saleha (Raja Ali Haji's Cousin). However, the association of south Sumatera theatre has decided by doing research that the writer of "Kejayaan kerajaan Melayu" is Raja Ali Haji (Sumatera Express, 2008).

The existence of Dulmuluk in Palembang had close relationship with Malay kingdom and the spread of Islam in Sumatera Island (Halim, 2006). Relating to Islamic culture, all actors are men. The actors pretend to be women when they need to play as women until the end of 1980s (Halim, 2006).

The most popular dulmuluk actor which is called "suhu" was Wak Nang Nong. He played Dulmuluk from 1919s in Tangga Panjang 7 ulu Palembang and then he staged in many district area in Palembang, such as; Banyuasin, Muara Enim, Lahat, Ogan Komering ilir and so forth. Later on, Ogan Komering Ilir was the central of dulmuluk development (Halim, 2006).

### **The Biography of Raja Ali haji**

As mention above that Raja Ali Haji is the person who has important role in introducing dulmuluk theatre and malay culture in Palembang. Because of this, this essay will describe briefly about his biography.

The Living Malay Kingdom (2009) stated that Raja Ali Haji's full name is Raja Ali Haji bin Raja Haji Fisabilillah bin Opu daeng Celak. He was born in Riau-Lingga Sultanate Penyengat Island in 1808. The Riau-Lingga Sultanate was the famous as the centre of Malay culture that actively developed some sectors such as; religion, language and culture. Today, the Riau-Lingga Sultanate has changed to be Riau Islands.

Raja Ali Haji was the son of Raja Ahmad. He was the grandson of Raja Ali Haji Fisabilillah. His mother was Encik Hamidah who was a daughter of panglima Malik Selangor Malaysia. Raja Ali Haji received his basic education from his family; especially his father. He got education from some famous teachers in Riau-Lingga Sultanate in Penyengat Island. At that time, Riau-Lingga Sultanate was the centre of Malay culture that actively developed some sectors such as; religion, language and literature. Today, Riau Island is still the centre of Malay Culture that official language is Malay.

He was also known by Dutch government because he and his father Raja Ahmad led his group for having a journey to Batavia for three months. The aim of this journey was to set cooperation with the Dutch government in commercial and research program.

Furthermore, Raja Ali was able to write the book entitled "Tuhfal al-Nafis" which told his incredible experiences during his visit to Betawi, such as; his visiting to the opera in the Schouwburg building which is now Jakarta art building and his meeting with Christiaan Van Angelbeek who is the official interpreter for the Dutch indigenous administration council.

In fact, he took a great concern on his writing since 1846. He was one of productive writer in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, Johor and Pahang. Starting from his famous poem (syair) "Gurindam dua belas" (in Dutch Language; *Tidjschrift van het bataviaasch genootschap II*). Gurindam 12 often use in Dulmuluk performance. The characteristics of Gurindam are:

1. Every main sentence relates to other sentences; the sentences talk about the fact by using rhythm and “peribahasa”.
2. The poem is look like question and answer; the first line is question and the second line is question. The poem must be perfect to answer those questions.

Particularly, he was famous with his book “kejayaan kerajaan melayu”. This book is about King Abdul Muluk. This book is the main source in performing Dulmuluk until present day.

On November 10<sup>th</sup> 2004, Raja Ali haji was awarded the title “National Hero” by the president Susilo Bambang Yudoyono. This is because his dedication to develop Indonesian culture, especially Malay culture. “Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa” which was published in 1985-1986 proved that he deserves to be a national hero.

### **The characteristics of Dulmuluk theatre**

As stated earlier that dulmuluk is different from ludruk and ketoprak. Ludruk and ketoprak tend to perform many kinds of story which are from legends and history where as dulmuluk focuses on the story of the King Abdul Muluk. Dulmuluk is interesting because it performs poems (syair), Malay songs, dialogues and jokes in every performance (Rambang dangku, 2008). Kompas (2007) reported that dulmuluk theatre manipulated dialogues orally without scenario or script. So, the actors improve their performance from their practices every time before performance.

The first and the most important characteristic of dulmuluk is the poem or syair that should be read every performance:

*Berhentilah kisah raja Hindustan,  
Tersebutlah pada suatu perkataan,  
Abdul Hamid syah paduka sultan,  
Duduklah baginda bersuka-sukaan,*

*Abdul Muluk putra baginda,  
Besarlah sudah bangsawan muda,  
Cantik menjelis usulnya syahda,  
Tiga belas tahun umurnya ada.*

This poem should be read before or during perform on the stage. This poem is called syair. Halim (2006) stated that syair is the kind of old poem which is from Arabic language “Syu’ur” that means “feeling”.

Crayonpedia (n.d) showed how to make syair, that is;

1. Each paragraph has four lines.
2. Each line has four words.
3. Every line is containing.
4. The form of syair is a-a-a-a.
5. Each paragraph can not stand alone.

Syair should be like a dialogue, the syair shows the conversation between a king and his prime minister. For example; Ayuhai adinda yang bijak bestari,

Dengan sebenarnya saya berperi,  
Apalah khabar didalam negeri,  
Amankah tiada engkau kabari,  
Adinda bilang nyata dan pasti,  
Supaya saya dapat mengetahui.

Besides syair, dulmuluk is also popular with the song that is sung more often after the king listen to the announcement from his prime minister;

*Sukaku tidak terkira lagi  
Semenjak saya memerintah didalam negeri  
Semua rakyat berhimpun didalam negeri  
Wayang dan tandak berjoget dan menari  
Bersuka ria didalam negeri*

The words in this song will be repeated in dialogues. The rhythm of this song can be changed depending on the story.

Another characteristic is the story is always about the Kingdom. The theatre usually performs two kings; "king Hindustan" and "king Barbari". The story also tell about kings' family, such as; a queen, a prince, a princess and a house maid (dulmuluk called chadam). The length of performance is shorter than ludruk or wayang from Java, this is only two hours long.

### **The development of Dulmuluk**

At the end of 19 century, Wan Bakar was from Mecca come to Palembang to sell something to people. After selling, he took a rest and read the story about the adventure of King Abdul Muluk who is the son of Sultan Abdul hamid syah in Negeri Barbari. Palembang people were interested in that story and called Wan Bakar as a story teller (Kompas, 2007). Then, Wan Bakar with his friends; Kamaludin and Pasirah Nurhasan added gambus music while he was telling the story.

In 1919, Syair Dulmuluk was changed becoming dialogues. This is the first time of dulmuluk theatre performed on the stage. Dulmuluk theatre was known not only in South Sumatera but also was in Bangka and Belitung in 1960s-1970s (Kompas, 2007). At that time, there were many Dulmuluk theatre groups which performed in ceremonies.

Dulmuluk theatre is increasingly popular from year to year. Sumatera Express (2008) agrees that in the 90's era, Dulmuluk increase popularity sharply because it successfully packed in both local and national television. Dulmuluk is also introduced as entry program in school. According to Muhsin (as cited in Sumatera Express, 2008), Dulmuluk develop gradually since many dulmuluk theatres formed at schools.

Muhsin Fajri the chairman of public traditional theatre South Sumatera informed that Dulmuluk theatre often stages on several traditional ceremonies, such as; sunatan, aqiqahan and many more. Muhsin Fajri also

added that currently there are twenty high quality dulmuluk actors who active in a variety of theatre performance (Kompas, 2006).

However, the traditional dulmuluk theatre is threatened extinct today. Kompas (2006) reported that dulmuluk showed crisis regeneration because senior actors do not educate young actors and a variety of entertainment options for Palembang people, such as television, movie and attractive music. People tend to show modern theatre than dulmuluk. This is because; dulmuluk perhaps perform similar stories and characters.

Economic factors are one of problem that cause dulmuluk theatre sink. Kompas (2007) wrote that every performance dulmuluk theatre needs 15 players and they are paid about one million – 1, 5 million rupiah (it is about \$AUS 100). The payment is not only for players but also for paying the equipments that they hire, such as; microphones, sound systems and many more.

The fact shows that even though in crisis, there are dulmuluk actors who exist to play dulmuluk theatre. For example: Wak pet (63), Saidi Kamaludin (69) and many more. They still keep the theatre even though they just perform the theatre once a year when ceremony of Palembang anniversary. Indonesian government, particularly Palembang governor attempts to activate dulmuluk theatre. In 2001, Saidi Kamaluddin received art award from Palembang Governor and in 2007, he was awarded as senior artist (maestro) on Dulmuluk by Indonesian government.

### **The role of Dulmuluk for the Indonesian literature**

Dulmuluk theatre relates to social issues in Palembang because the stories in dulmuluk draw Palembang and Malay culture together with some issues in social life. Pudji Astuti (2006) agreed that dulmuluk developed after arrival of Islam. Dulmuluk grew relating to visiting Arab scholar led to emergence of a new generation of local religious scholar and writers. This is because; dulmuluk theatre performs not only the story of King Abdul Muluk but also gives messages in both religious and social life.

Dulmuluk proves that Indonesia has many cultures not only from java but also from Sumatera. Undoubtedly, wayang is more popular than Dulmuluk since wayang have existed from 10<sup>th</sup> century and known by all areas in Java Island. The fact shows that there are many kinds of wayang, such as; wayang kulit, wayang golek, wayang wong and so forth. Wayang is also a media to spread religion, for example Hindu's religion. So, wayang is more familiar for Indonesian people than dulmuluk theatre.

Dukmuluk is beneficial for Indonesian culture, particularly Malay culture. Halim (2006) agreed that Dulmuluk is a mean to introduce Malay culture because it performs the kind of old poem or syair every time when it is on the stage; such as Gurindam 12. Syair Abdul Muluk that is read in every performance is one of historical asset for Palembang culture. Puji Astuti (2006) recommended Syair dulmuluk as Palembang Manuscript which contain poetical form.

## Conclusion

Dulmuluk or Abdul Muluk is one of traditional drama of Indonesia. This develops in Sumatera Island, particularly Palembang South Sumatera. Dulmuluk has tight relation with Malay culture. Dulmuluk was from the book "Kejayaan kerajaan Melayu" that was written by Raja Ali Haji. He was the famous writer from Riau-Lingga Sultanate (now Riau Island).

Dulmuluk theatre performs King Abdul Muluk story. King Abdul Muluk is a wise king who lives in Malay Kingdom. Syair or old poem is one of the characteristic of dulmuluk. Malay songs and gambus music are another characteristic of dulmuluk. Dulmuluk developed in 1960s and 1970s. Today, dulmuluk is slow and weak because some reasons, such as; the variety of entertainment in Palembang.

In my opinion, dulmuluk theatre should exist because this can prove that Palembang also has traditional drama the same as Java has wayang. Dulmuluk has important role for Indonesian literature as this introduce Malay language and culture which is the root of "Bahasa Indonesia".

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