

The Role of Authentic Malay Songs in the Social Life of Malay Society

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Abstract: This research focuses on the role of original Malay songs in the social life of the Malay community. The importance of describing the role of traditional music, considering that the art of singing original Malay songs is a cultural treasure of the Malay community that has been inherited from generation to generation and has a long history. As a basic cultural expression in the field of music, it certainly has a close relationship in the social life of the supporting community. The selection of Original Malay Song Singing is because the art belongs to and the cultural identity of the Malay community collectively. His works that seem beautiful and alive are able to be preserved in a long span of time for several generations as a form that has noble values, meaning and beauty. The phenomenological method is an approach used to seek in-depth understanding, and try to understand the meaning of events and their relationships to people who are in certain situations in revealing the phenomena and symptoms caused in this case describing the role that Nyanyian Lagu Melayu Asli has which implicitly frames three roles that are relevant to the social life of the Malay community. Based on the elaboration that has been done, three important roles were found to answer the problem, first as a unifier of the Malay community, second, as cultural communication and third, as the identity of the Malay community.

Keywords: role; original Malay songs; social life; Malay community.

1. Introduction

Traditional arts are the result of the minds of people in a region as a manifestation of local cultural values that are poured into works through various branches of art and passed down from generation to generation. In this case, Lomax (1986) emphasized that traditional music is music that was born and developed in a certain area from one generation to the next. One example of traditional music is the original Malay songs, songs that are passed down through oral tradition from certain people, as a cultural heritage that is passed on to find out messages from the previous Malay community (ancestors).

Likewise, the Malay community as the bearer of culture has a long history of cultural similarities that have developed from generation to generation as its identity. Nyanyian Lagu Melayu Asli (NLMA) as a Malay cultural treasure is a basic cultural expression in the field of music. NLMA is usually chanted by Malays and sometimes accompanied by typical Malay dances. The lyrics contain rhymes with teachings (moral values). As a historical and social text its works have traditional cues and symbols both to be heard and performed. This genre has become a heritage for the allied Malay peoples covering the entire region of Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei and the Philippines including the Malay diaspora in other countries.

The traditional music culture of NLMA, reminds us of the nostalgia of a few years ago, when the tradition of singing this genre was still close to the hearts of its supporters. The song's meaning symbolizes how this song is deeply rooted in the hearts of its listeners. As we quote the view of ethnomusicologists who explain music will remain alive if the supporting community still needs or uses it and vice versa if the music loses its function then the music will slowly disappear.

In the above connection, it can be believed that an NLMA performance as traditional music is closely related to its role in society. This certainly includes all the activities carried out by the community in singing and listening to NLMA inseparable from the form of music itself in the hearts of its audience. The music is formed from a harmonious unity of rhythm, melody and harmony, making this genre beautiful enough to be sung as a symbol of self-expression in expressing a sense of art. In essence, NLMA is a work of art of the Malay community which can certainly be enjoyed and lived by its supporting community. In line with the opinion of Koentjaraningrat (1985), that the distinctive style of a culture such as art, is due to a special physical form and expression that is only owned by the art, in the art there are various channels of emotional needs and thoughts for the community itself. Or the art has meanings and expressions that are able to accept the emotional channeling of the supporting community. Therefore, the art becomes the property and cultural identity of the supporting community collectively.

The creation of NLMA, represents the beliefs, sensibilities, musicality and aesthetic experiences revealed in the work of a composer of his time. With a high level of thought and imagination, this genre has provided

messages and instructions in its verses that are identical to the personality of the Malay people. The Malay community with its cultural treasures is known as a civilized society, has a good personality, high morality, is creative and always tries hard to achieve what it wants. With its works that seem beautiful and alive, it is able to be preserved over a long period of time for several generations as a form that has noble values, meaning and beauty.

The explanation above provides a real understanding of the works of art created, of course, representing the view of life of the Malay people in their era. Malay art is an expression of the culture of the Malay people. It contains the Malay value system, which is used as a guide and instruction in culture. Malay art is an integral part of traditional institutions (Takari, 2013). NLMA was quite popular in its time such as: Lancang Kuning, Dondang Sayang, Jalak Lenteng and so on, generally spread across the Sumatra peninsula and Southeast Asia Region.

The musical ability possessed from the creation of NLMA is the basic capital of Malay society in realizing its main function as a musical culture through aesthetic experiences in the social life of Malay society in general. Quoting the opinion of anthropologist Koentjaraningrat (1971) which explains various human actions cannot be separated from a number of systems that exist in humans as a cultural living being.

One thing that cannot be denied, cultural diversity in heterogeneity causes the slow development of local culture. The open nature of Malay society, causes the easy entry of other cultural influences from migrants who live on Malay land. As a carrier of culture from their home land, it quickly shifts traditional art in the hearts of the community due to changes in perspective due to the weak cultural background of individuals in general. Although Riau Province is one of the areas that still maintains the existence of NLMA. Even now, on certain occasions in the community, NLMA is still presented and still favored by its very limited supporters.

Likewise, the NLMA that we are familiar with today is a Malay art of the past where the development of the art of sung rhymes. Of course, the early NLMA may have been simpler. In this case we have lost its original form before it received influences from various musical elements. In its later development, the NLMA received Arabic influences, for example in the Zapin category. There is also Javanese influence in the Langgam style. The styles in Gazal and Inang are believed to have developed within the palace, while the Joged and Langgam rhythms may have been influenced by popular music culture.

European influence is believed to have coincided with the arrival of Portuguese merchants with the introduction of violins, guitars and the development of melodies based entirely on the Western diatonic system. This development was not instantaneous but took place over a long period of time, century after century. The NLMA's peak can be predicted with the advent of recording technology and radio broadcasting. In addition, the Bintang Radio festival organized by Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) included the NLMA in one of the categories. This golden age ranged from the 1970s to the 1980s.

When television broadcasting became uncontrollable in its programs, that is, when commercialism swept the world, the NLMA gradually experienced a period of fading. The Bintang Radio festival was deemed unprofitable and was discontinued in the 1990s. In addition, with the advent of advanced information technology, people began to decide for themselves which entertainment arts they wanted to enjoy. By the early 2000s, the NLMA had become increasingly marginalized and only a very limited number of enthusiasts were still willing to revive this noble traditional art. From time to time, the Indonesian government has been powerless to pay attention to traditional cultural arts, but the people themselves are still trying to maintain them.

Despite this situation, efforts in fighting for traditional culture should still be done and even become something that should never stop. Especially considering its important role in the social life of the Malay community. It can be said that this genre is at an alarming and very worrying point. In an unbearable condition, the NLMA lives stagnantly and seems to be in suspended animation. For this reason, what should be done is to strengthen traditional arts as the great ideals set forth in Riau Vision 2020, which makes Riau the center of Malay culture in Southeast Asia.

Based on the above review, the author feels that this study is important to find out how the role of the NLMA in the social life of the Malay community in general is related to the noble culture of the Malay community and the Malay diaspora in various parts of the world.

2. Research methods

The role of the Original Malay Song in the social life of the Malay community is an interesting phenomenon to be studied in this research. As traditional music, the original Malay song singing is not only an artistic activity for the supporting community but has become an inseparable part of the social life of the community. Based on this, the research method that researchers use in this study is a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach that seeks deep understanding, and seeks to understand the meaning of events and their relationships to people who are in certain situations in revealing phenomena and symptoms caused (Moleong, 2007). The research location set in this study is the Riau area where this genre is still always

performed at various traditional events and entertainment events.

This stage of research has begun with reading and studying written materials, which are quite significant as references, especially for the discussion of the role of the NLMA in the social life of the Malay community. Data collection was carried out using observation techniques (observation), in-depth interviews and documentation. The observation carried out is participant observation where the researcher is directly involved in the NLMA performance that is displayed. In addition, researchers were also involved as spectators in NLMA performances by observing the progress of an NLMA performance. In-depth interviews were also conducted in this research aimed at cultural figures, art practitioners who are in direct contact with NLMA art and supporting communities who still have a sense of belonging and love for NLMA art. This in-depth interview was intended to explore their views regarding the NLMA which focused on the role of the NLMA in the social life of the Malay community. Furthermore, the data obtained is sorted out to be analyzed in order to get conclusions in answering the existing study problems. In this research, the data analysis technique used is the Miles and Huberman (2012) model which divides qualitative data analysis into three streams of activity, namely data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing.

3. Result and Discussion

Original Malay songs implicitly frame three roles that are relevant to the social life of the Malay community, first as a unifier of the Malay community, second, as cultural communication and third, as the identity of the Malay community. Essentially, NLMA is a traditional musical art of the Malay community that has been passed down from generation to generation and belongs to the collective cultural identity of the Malay community. Its works that seem beautiful and lively are able to be preserved over a long period of several generations as a form that has noble values, meaning and beauty.

The Role of NLMA as a Unifier of the Malay Community

Indonesia is a multicultural society that has a cultural treasure of noble value, this can be reflected in all aspects of Indonesian life. The Malay community is one of the diversity of tribes in Indonesia, which has a fair cultural treasure including the NLMA. NLMA as traditional music is a cultural symbol of the Malay community that characterizes as an identity in the aesthetic expression of the adherents.

Cultural symbols that already have meaning become a guide in art that is a member of a Malay community. It is in this context that the cultural identity of a society or a community is finally formed. The cultural symbols of a society will be interpreted by analyzing the context in which the symbol was built. Therefore, a symbol is no longer a compaction of a meaning but a variety of meanings that depend on the social group to which it refers.

NLMA as a cultural symbol is a universal element that can unite the Malay community wherever they are, considering this genre to be a symbol of harmony in the social life of the supporting community. NLMA for the Malay community is local wisdom that has been tested over the years as an art that has cultural values as a unifier. This can be seen where this genre is an art of the Malay ethnicity, but it is also open and can be learned by other ethnicities. In line with research (Huka, R.Y et.al, 2023) explains that traditional singing has an important role as a community identity and culture that needs to be preserved and developed so that on the one hand this singing becomes one of the unifying identities of the community, and on the other hand, as local cultural wisdom is not eroded by the times.

If you look closely, although the NLMA is currently less popular, the performances of this genre are still in the hearts of its supporters. This can be seen where at traditional events, social occasions, offerings and festivals traditional songs are still often performed. NLMA is commonly sung by Malay people wherever they are. With vocal techniques that are specific and somewhat different from bel canto vocal techniques. This difference is related to Malay customs that are not beautiful if singing with a wide open mouth, so the articulation of the verses spoken in NLMA is certainly adapted to these customs. The Malay melismatic voice in the presentation is closely related to the emotions, feelings and appreciation in expressing the NLMA.

There is a fact that singing is a typical art with direct expression from the heart. David C. Taylor (2007) explains so precisely how the expression of feelings, emotions and expressions is a very pure human element. Touching on the same matter Lili Lehman (2006) reveals a word is an idea that has a great deal to do with the color of sound and the emotional connection it must express. Finally, Clippinger (2006) has aptly expressed how a singer's voice has tremendous power of expression. This is also the case with NLMA the feelings expressed over the interpretation of the song text. Through his imaginative abilities, the singer evokes within himself the feelings he is experiencing. The goal he wants to achieve is to make his listeners also feel deeply the expression of the feelings he wants to convey.

The expression above gives an idea of the sensitivity of feelings that arise in singing NLMA. The selection of song texts in the form of rhymes as deductive Malay literary works of art contains moral messages

as instructions in the daily social life of the Malay community. NLMA in its presentation is always accompanied by several musical instruments such as violins, drums, gambus stringed instruments with beautiful arrangements and sometimes also as an accompaniment to local dances, for example, offering dances, strengthening the sense of belonging to the art itself so that it can be said to be a unifier of the existing Malay community art community.

Some important messages captured from the explanation above show that the tradition of singing Original Malay Songs has a spirit of collectivity as a unifier in the social life of the Malay community. NLMA whose home is in Riau and anywhere in the Malay community (Malay Diaspora) who have the same interest in preserving and developing NLMA. That is the shared-feeling function that exists in the NLMA.

The Role of NLMA as Cultural Communication

Singing for certain communities, including allied Malay communities, is a kind of activity that is specialized as a cultural communication tool. This is in accordance with what Minette Mans (2009) said in translation "As a form of culture learned by the allied Malay community from generation to generation over the centuries, Nyanyian Melayu Asli is a natural symbol of musical communication. But this symbolism has been submerged in the various behavioral choices of the people that keep changing with the times. Unfortunately, these changes tend to ignore the meaning of cultural symbolism about Nyanyian Melayu Asli. So that the meaning of cultural symbolism of this genre has been reduced in such a way as to become a kind of hobby or in relation to the industry, only as a profession that takes into account whether or not it sells in the popular music market.

In terms of the dissemination of the NLMA as a symbol of allied cultures, this relates to the shared sense of belonging of various Malay-cultured communities wherever they may be. In terms of the geographical spread of the genre to various parts of Southeast Asia, we can borrow Mans' (2009) quote from Alan Lomax (1968) in this way: This opinion confirms the shared feeling of allied Malay communities wherever they are for their preference of Nyanyian Lagu Melayu Asli as a form of cultural communication between them.

As a cultural symbol, music is also a language. Whether it is a universal language or not is not the main concern of this discussion. It is only worth mentioning here that just as there is no universal music, there is also no such thing as a universal language. But it must be recognized that music is a form of language for communication. Umberto Eco (1972), as quoted by Downing A. Thomas (1995) in translation says that, "Music is another kind of language that has another, freer and differently structured system of articulation".

With the above reasons, NLMA as a culture for allied Malay nations wherever they are, also functions as a language for communication between fellow allied nations. It is also possible that this communication language can also be understood by other nations, because as a communication language, Nyanyian Melayu Asli is open to learning. According to structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss in translation "Language is widely understood as something related to the system of social intercourse" (Anna Herbert. 2010).

NLMA as a medium of communication carries a cultural message for the Malay community and may also be for other nations. The flowing rhythm and song text characterize the social identity of the Malay community in art. In singing NLMA, it is required to have a distinctive ability, namely the quality of a soft and flowing voice. In addition, when singing the song text must be spoken clearly so that the message conveyed can be understood by the audience. Correct articulation plays an important role considering that pantun is rich with moral messages that have been used by Malays in every aspect of life. Various experiences can be incarnated in pantun given the Malay way of thinking which tends to express it metaphorically. That is, Malays have a tendency to look at an object or problem through inner depth, then later express the results of thoughts, appreciation and imagination with Mataforik, namely symbols and figures of speech (Hamidy, 2011). This is what makes pantun as a song text from NLMA a very strong dimension of communication language in the social life of Malay society.

In addition, NLMA as an art of the Malay community was created with local identity and sung as a means of self-actualization in the cultural communication of the Malay community. NLMA as an aesthetic expression of its creator is conveyed in a work of art that has a message to the audience. Quoting the opinion of Merriam (1964), it is suggested that the use of music relates to the situation in which music is treated among human activities, while the function of music concerns the purpose and effect of the use of music (its efficacy) in meeting social needs. This means that NLMA as a traditional art has a meaning that is appreciated by the Malay community, with the aim of conveying messages as a form of communication.

The description above explains the NLMA as a work of art that is reflected in the aesthetic symbols conveyed by its creator and enjoyed by its supporters, meaning that here there has been artistic communication that creates an artistic experience so that it can be well received in a cultural context for the Malay community. Song texts that can represent feelings of sadness, joy, happiness and so on that describe the inner atmosphere of the creator reflected through NLMA provide a clear picture of the role of NLMA as a medium of cultural

communication for the Malay community.

The Role of NLMA as a Malay Community Identity

NLMA as a traditional art can be said to be one of the symbols of the Malay nation in marking its identity as the identity of its people. This genre has existed for a long time as a collective shared property and has been agreed upon as an embodiment of community identity with strong characteristics from the region of origin. For example, if we hear the song "Jalak Lenteng, Dondang Sayang, Joget Selayang Pandang and other Malay Songs" with song verses containing pantun-pantun, what is imagined or what comes to the listener's mind is that these are Malay songs that come from the culture of the Malay people wherever they are. Quoting the opinion of Irawati (2016) explains "music and other aspects or behavior in human life do have a relationship, so that understanding of a culture can be achieved, among others, through the study of its music".

NLMA is a noble wealth and pride of the Malay community which has a very important role in the social life of the community. In addition to its role as a unifier of the Malay community and a medium of communication between people who have a shared feeling, the NLMA is also the identity of the Malay Community. Levi Strauss in Anna Herbert (2010) asserts that culture is the identity of the Malay community. Moreover, pantun as a poem from the NLMA is an important idiom that has great values as the identity of the Malay community. The pantun text in NLMA is the formation of the laws contained in the repertoire including the musical theories that frame it. Its aesthetics have contextual values that relate to the musical behavior of a community formed by a community that wants to express cultural characteristics (cultural identity) making it a common property (W.F Hanks, 1989).

NLMA as a symbol has been used collectively which has meaning and becomes an artistic guide for the Malay community. It is in this context that cultural identity is formed or built. This is also the case with other traditional arts such as Ponorogo, which is known for its reog, Aceh with its Saman Dance, North Sumatra with its Gondang Nine, Minang with its celempung which carries the identity of the culture of the community of origin and is agreed upon as the main marker of its identity. Harwanto & Sunarto (2018) said that traditional arts are full of cultural values, which should be a means of inheritance for the next generation and even become the identity of a region.

The explanation above emphasizes that NLMA as a traditional art should continue to have a place and become an identity to cultural heritage. However, planning to promote traditional art performances or activities must receive support, especially from the community as a community, the government and also the role of various mass media both print and electronic media to continue to strive to maintain and preserve it as a high quality Malay cultural treasure.

4. Conclusion

The original Malay Songs is a traditional musical art as a cultural treasure of the Malay community that has been inherited from generation to generation and has a long history. As a high quality cultural treasure, NLMA should be maintained and preserved, for which support is needed from various parties including the community as a community, the government and various mass media. As a basic cultural expression in the field of music, the NLMA certainly has a close relationship with the social life of the supporting community. Its essence implicitly frames three roles that are relevant to the social life of the Malay community, so that the elaboration of the role of the Original Malay song was found to have three important roles to answer the problem. First, as a unifier of the Malay community, second, as cultural communication, and third, as the identity of the Malay community.

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