

# Preserving and Promoting Malay Folklores Through Souvenir Product: Pak Belalang

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## Abstract

Malay legends and folklore are one of the heritage gems that unite us as people through many centuries. It is a tradition that has been passed down through many generations in oral and written among the people. It tells the story of our people and some address various messages to be learnt. Malay folklore should be preserved and passed down to future generations as it contributes to a greater understanding of national identity. Ignorance of the current generations and lack of concern in protecting our Malay folklore will result in future generations with less understanding of national roots which also result in a lack of identity. Articles by local researchers can be found on ways to attract a contemporary audience and preserving the folklore tradition. The researcher was given the task of promoting Malay folklore by designing a product souvenir for the tourism industry as it reflects the country's tradition to the world. It can be an interactive tool in remembering Malay folklore and also as an introduction to other countries about Malay folklore. One of the famous Malay folklore is Pak Belalang which has its adaptation of a movie directed by Tan Sri P Ramlee. It is a comedic story that attracts many families. This article will share in-depth the story of Pak Belalang and how it works as a tool in bringing back the national heritage through an effective souvenir that reflects the country's tradition and identity.

*Keywords* - Malay folklore, Pak Belalang, Souvenir, National Heritage, Culture, Identity.

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## 1. Introduction

Pak Belalang is one of Malay folklore who has turned into a film directed by Tan Sri P. Ramlee in the late 1950s. It is a story where it is still popular up to this date due to the film popularity that has been playing for decades and still be playing in most of our homes these days. The story is about a lazy father and his son named Belalang. As to that, the father is called 'Pak Belalang' which means the father of Belalang. Both of them form a conspiracy where the father portrays as an astrologer to help out fellow villagers in trouble. Children mostly get attracted by Belalang which has a smart and witty character. Pak Belalang is a story written for a book entitled "Cherita Jenaka" which compresses bardic tales by Raja Haji Yahya along with other folklore such as 'Pak Kadok', 'Pak Pandir', 'Lebai Malang' and 'Si Lunchai'. The book was published by Methodist Publishing House in Singapore in 1908 by R.O. Winstedt and A. J. Sturrock. According to a study by Jelani Harun, there is a great possibility that Pak Belalang was originally crafted by Raja Haji Yahya himself. The story of Pak Belalang contained social criticisms concerning the foolishness of the Malay people and their rulers.

## 2. History and Originality of Pak Belalang

'Ibarat Nyiur Gading' is a book written by Jelani Harun (2018) contains a detailed biography and research study on the life of one of Malay Literature Father, Raja Haji Yahya. Not many have known of his importance in Malay literature history especially during his times in the 20th century as we were shadowed by the Western writers. There were also not much information and acknowledgement about our old writers. One of the reasons was, they were not interested in putting their name in the public probably due to humbleness and their low key profile. Until recently, a professor from Universiti Sains Malaysia made a thorough research on him and present it in a book.

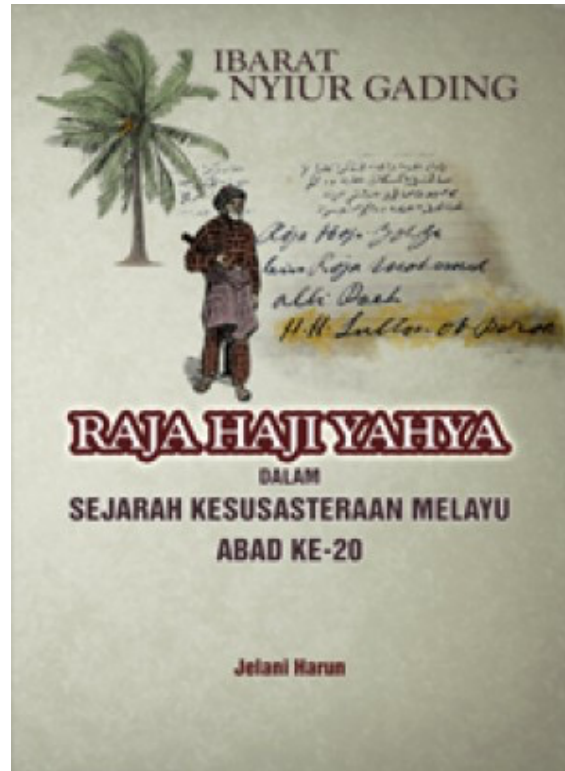


Figure 1. *Ibarat Nyiur Gading* by Jelani Harun

Raja Haji Yahya was originally from Chenderiang, Perak born around the 19th century and died in the early 1930s. He is a descendant of Sultan Iskandar Dzulkarnain Shah (1754-1764), the 15th Ruler of Perak and Sayid Hussein al-Faradz from Hadramaut, one of the oldest Sayyid clans in Malaysia. He was a headman in the state of Perak, also a reputable medicine man.

According to Jelani Harun writing, back in the old days a headman, imam and medicine man plays an important role in being the ruler of their tribe or area. Besides that in their tradition, the Perak headman also conveys folk tales orally to the local folks. This is a type of early entertainment where the headman entertain the local people when they gather and being their unofficial narrator of Malay folk stories. Most of the stories were being narrated by Pawang Ana. Pawang Ana is one of Malay historical 'penglipur lara'. He lived during the 19th century and was originally from Rao, West Sumatra. It was during the Padri War that fought from 1803 till 1837 between the Padris and Adats that brings Pawang Ana to Malaya and landed himself in Gopeng, Perak. He was one of the many people who escaped by the Dutch who tried to Christianized everyone in West Sumatra after losing to the Dutch during the battle. "Padris" were Muslims from Sumatra who was inspired by Wahabism after returning from Hajj wanted to purify the unislamic Minangkabau tradition by the "Adat". Angered by the actions of the padris, the adats seek for Dutch help which leads to Dutch colonialism in West Sumatra. Many Muslims figure and clerics were killed during the war, one of them was Tuanku Imam Bonjol. History also wrote that many artefacts which include historical documents from the Malay archipelago were seized to bring to Europe and during the transfer, the ships were burned and sunk.



Figure 2. An image describing Pawang Ana by Winstedt in *Malayan Memories*.

Pawang Ana is not his real name. He hides his real identity since he was hiding from the Dutch. The word 'Pawang' is described as a medicine man, shaman, or healer. Prof Mohd Taib Osman described him as an old Sumatran warrior. Writing by R.O. Winstedt, explains that it was him who found the body of J.W.W Birch. "It was at Tapah that I began to collect Malay folktales from Pawang Ana, a Malay who had recovered the body of Mr Birch, the first Resident of Perak, from the river after his murder."

The Headman of Chenderiang, Raja Haji Yahya had enjoyed close relations with R.O. Winstedt. "In the year 1924, R.O. Winstedt was appointed Director of Education of the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements, and was directly involved in efforts to publish reading materials for the Malay teachers at the time as part of his endeavour to establish the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in Tanjong Malim, in 1922. In order to accomplish the mission of compiling the reading materials, R.O. Winstedt had sought the assistance of Raja Haji Yahya who was then serving as headman of Chenderiang. " (Jelani Hassan, 2018). Winstedt who had a PhD in literature from Oxford University had a deep interest in Malay literature. With this, Raja Haji Yahya introduced him to Pawang Ana and his son-in-law. "Winstedt formed a friendship with two remarkable Malays who provided him with a mine of information about Malay lore. ...Beginning on Saturday afternoon and ending on Sunday evenings, this old Sumatran warrior recited Awang Sulong and other Malay folk-tales while Winstedt took them down." (John Bastin dan R. Roolvink) Some of Pawang Ana's writings are *Hikayat Malim Deman*, *Hikayat Raja Muda*, *Hikayat Malim Dewa*, *Hikayat Anggun Cik Tunggal*, *Hikayat Awang Sulung Merah Muda*.

With this gather information, the researcher concludes that Pawang Ana has a high influence in the shape of Raja Haji Yahya who contributes large achievements to our Malay folklore. Many of Malay folklores has almost the same resemblance with the Indonesian folklore due to the migration of the people in the early times. Some of the folklore which has the resemblance are *Si Tanggang*, *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*, *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup* and others. This folklore has 2 versions, the Malays and Indonesian which they share similar stories and characters. However, stories like Pak Kadok and Pak Belalang were not found in a different version in Indonesia. As mentioned by Jelani Harun, this is probably because it is an original craft by Raja Haji Yahya. A Perak born headman who has a deep interest in Malay Literature. He and Pawang Ana together with the help of Winstedt shape the history of Malay Literature.



Figure 3. An old book entitled *Cherita Jenaka dan Penglipur Lara* by Raja Haji Yahya which include the story of Pak Belalang.

### 3. Analysis

People often referring to Nujum Pak Belalang when hearing Pak Belalang Malay folklore due to its popularity that still last to this date. The movie gave such a high impact not just because it is well directed and acted but also the messages inside the movie or the original story itself that tells the foolishness of our people in a comedic way. In a way, Tan Sri P Ramlee and Raja Haji Yahya were trying to educate the people for not easily being fooled just to get rewards and positions. Pak Belalang may be a lazy man and a coward but he may have a pure heart and considered a little bit smart as he uses his wittiness to save himself in few cases. To the researcher, Belalang is seen to be the real hero yet his part is shadowed by his father's role. Although Belalang is the one who saves almost everyone in the film, he plays the part where most children would do, obey and depends on his father, the adult in the family. The compilation of Pak Belalang and Belalang makes a unique and interesting duo as these two characters are nothing without each other. To the researcher, the heart of the story is the character of these two. Both shown the untypical father and son relationship yet still stays together as a family. It is a perfect combination for a comedic series which gave the researcher an idea for her souvenir product.

### 4. Souvenir

A souvenir is a form of an item where it can cherish moments as it holds emotional value to it whether it reminds the person of the places they go or old memories that bring joy to the person. It is usually a gift for when a person travels to a certain country, he or she will bring back an item to home to be given to his or her friends and family. Keychains, fridge magnets and mugs are the common things people would buy as souvenirs as these items are still in demand. These items are the simplest yet still, the useful item either to be used or as a collector's item. The image of Pak Belalang and Belalang should be shared with all that means throughout the world and there is nothing quicker in this era than IOT which means the Internet of Things. We use the internet these days almost daily, every hour and every minute. We watch films through the internet, we read news through the internet, we communicate using the internet, our daily activities involve the internet. It is the most useful technology ever built. Spreading the story of Pak Belalang and Belalang can also be done through the internet. How do we do it? By making stories of them in series. The researcher did not intend to do an animation series at first however it sounded like a good idea. Souvenirs may still be reliable to this date however looking at how the world has changed, technology has emerged so fast which gave a question to the researcher that one

day we might not hold the value of the products anymore and worst we might lose Malay folklore to western entertainment and gadgets. We cannot control how technology evolves and how it changes our children these days but what we can do is embrace the technology with as much knowledge and information of our heritage values to be shared with younger generations. Children are one of the biggest consumer groups. Children can get attracted easily to what they see and hear. They will easily follow what they see on tv or these days, they watch it on youtube and start to imitate the same way from the figure they have seen. Our government supports the animation industry in Malaysia through many projects held by MDEC (Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation) One successful example of a local company that turned into a global phenomenon is Les Copaque who produce Upin Ipin. Upon Ipin tells the story of the life of twin boys who lived in kampung with the daily adventure they both had with friends and family. Upon Ipin is officially a tourism product that promotes Malaysia. The impact of this animation is so huge that makes them the first animation to collaborate with Tsuburaya Production who produce the world-famous series, Ultraman and created the first version of Malay Ultraman called Ultraman Ribut. Upin Ipin has attracted viewers from Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Japan, Russia and the middle east. In a few years, Upin Ipin will have its very own theme park that will make them Malaysia's first Disneyland. People from other countries especially children known Malaysia and some of our culture by watching this series. It clearly has shown that animation can introduce our country to the world. Not only that we will be able to preserve our heritage through this viewing and having Malay folklore will promote back the contemporary audience. Pak Belalang and Belalang is the perfect idea for an animation series. It can have a series of various humour events that Pak Belalang and Belalang are always trapped in incidents where eventually Belalang would save the day. The stories can be packed with morals and messages to be learned by future generations. It can also be an enjoyable series to be watched with the whole family



Figure 4. Pak Belalang and Belalang Character

Older generations might trigger their old memories of the Malay folklore and excited them back with a touch of modern hype into it. To come out with the animation series, not every company start with the animation series. A company called Lotta, the biggest animation company in China produces toys or merchandise to attract kids on buying them first before introducing to the children the series from the toy characters. Through this method, the consumer who is mostly children would wait to watch the first series. Another example is Mattel who is the maker of Barbie also started to have a series and movies of their toy character. The merchandise industry has a

huge market and it relates closely to the creative field to create a branded merchandise. Although this branding merchandise cannot escape from fake merchandise, the market industry is still very huge makes them resilient as long as the brand or IP (intellectual property) is strong.

What the researcher intends to do is to create a series of souvenirs from the 3D character design of Pak Belalang and Belalang. The 3D characters were originally sculpted and modelled by a professional 3D artist, Tengku Mohd Firdaus bin Tengku Ahmad Mazman who works in the local animation industry. The first model is Pak Belalang. He carries funny yet quite strong features. Since he works as a National Healer, his features cannot be naive or arrogant. He has to have a balanced character where he is not a smart man but pretends to be one. Pak Belalang's clothing imitates the clothing from the 19th-century wear mostly men wear pants and shirts. Considering Pak Belalang is the National Healer so he has a collar to his shirt and knife as a protector. He also has a bag of water to his left waist where not only he uses the water to drink but also to work on his 'magic'. The second model is Belalang. Belalang has a witty and funny feature. Belalang may see as a hardworking boy but he is also cunning and good at escapes from any troubles. Therefore, the left raise eye-brow is a trademark that the modeller and researcher create to brings out the Belalang character. He wears almost the same clothing as his father's except without a collar and knife. In the movie Nujum Pak Belalang, both of them wear a man headdress. Some shown Malay headdresses and some shown an Arabic influence headdress. In these characters, both of them wear a headdress that shows in between. A fabric loose typer that resemble Malay headdress type and covering the head which resembles the Islamic headdress. These headdresses are an invention by the modeller. It creates its 3D animation icon for the headdress. Besides the 3D characters design, the researcher also designed other popular souvenirs that most people can get from a branded merchandise which are toy figurines, mugs, t-shirt, keychains and fridge magnets. Considering Belalang character is a child character, it can attract kids consumers especially in their products. Types of products that can be placed in Belalang character to it are like slippers, pyjamas, backpacks, lunch boxes, water bottles, shoes and others. Kids would love to have his favourite character for his items like Ben10, Spiderman, Superman, and many more. It is nice to see a Malaysian boy wear his item showing a Malay character from Traditional Malay Folklore.



Figure 5. Possible proposed design

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many ways in preserving and promoting back Malay folklore. In this digital era, it is best to attract the audience by being innovative and creative. Creating a product is one thing but preserving the product in the market is an entrepreneurial mindset that should impose on most designers these days because we are creating a product that lasts. Any product will have its lifespan but a concept or an IP (intellectual property) will last from generation to generation. Imagine that medium combine with Malay folklore, the character from Malay folklore will continue to grow just how Mickey Mouse can last for 90 years now. Folklore is a series of stories that were told to entertain people and youngsters. It is a type of traditional entertainment. The activity of doing Malay folklore back in the old days might not be so relevant to these days however, we can continue to tell but in a different type of medium as long as it still spread the knowledge and message to be delivered. Most importantly, it will introduce to the world the characters of Pak Belalang and his son.

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