

The Malay Language ‘Pantun’ of Melaka Chetti Indians in Malaysia: Malay Worldview, Lived Experiences and Hybrid Identity

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ABSTRACT

The Melaka Chetti Indians are a small community of ‘*peranakan*’ (Malay meaning ‘locally born’) people in Malaysia. The Melaka Chettis are descendants of traders from the Indian subcontinent who married local women, mostly during the time of the Melaka Malay Empire from the 1400s to 1500s. The Melaka Chettis adopted the local lingua franca ‘*bahasa Melayu*’ or Malay as their first language together with the ‘*adat*’ (Malay meaning ‘customs’) of the Malay people, their traditional mannerisms and also their literary prowess. Not only did the Melaka Chettis successfully adopt the literary traditions of the Malay people, they also adapted these arts forms to become part of their own unique hybrid identities based on their worldviews and lived experiences within the Malay Peninsula or more famously known as the Golden Chersonese / Khersonese. Based on our one year plus fieldwork in ‘*Kampung Chetti*’ or Chetti Village in the state of Melaka, Malaysia where we carried out extensive oral history interviews and several focus group discussion sessions, in this empirical paper we share and critically analyse some traditional Malay pantuns that we collected from this community, and present them as notable contributions to the Malay literary canon.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said and written with reference to Malay language ‘*pantun*’ in Malaysia and in the Malay World within the Southeast Asian geographical region. Pantuns are at the core of the Malay language, and pantuns are acknowledged as the archetypal expression of Malay worldview and Malay identity through literary verse (see Adnan, 2013b). On the surface, pantuns are typically made up of short lines with an ‘a and b plus a and b’ rhyming arrangement. The first two lines are known as the ‘*pembayang*’ (literally, shadow or hint), followed by the last two lines of the ‘*maksud*’ (literally, meaning). Each line of a pantun might contain between eight to twelve syllables. The echoing of these syllables in the first and the third lines (a1 and a2) followed by the second and the fourth lines (b1 and b2) lend pantun its chant-like charm and lingual beauty. And, as rhyme and repetition come together,

the lines resonate between each pantun stanzas to project the beauty, charm, and finesse of the Malay language (Adnan & Pillay, forthcoming). At the same time, the historical beginnings of the Malay pantun as a popular literary art form in the Malay World remain quite vague. That being said, scholars of language and literature believe that Malay pantuns peaked through the growth of the Melaka Malay Empire between the 1400s to the 1500s (Salleh, 2014). Incidentally, this was also the period when the most notable and timeless Malay pantuns were first recorded.

We carried out this empirical study, amongst other central objectives, to add to the Malay literary canon, especially the archive of traditional Malay pantuns in the Malay World. Our focus matter is unique yet quite straightforward, namely the largely undocumented Malay language pantuns of the Malaysian Melaka Chetti Indian community (also referred to

as ‘*India Peranakan*’, ‘*Orang Chetti Melaka*’ or the Melaka Chettis); Indians by birth who are devout Hindus but who also possess Malay as their mother tongue as opposed to the Malay-Muslim majority ethnic group. Over the years, too little attention has been given to the sociohistory of Melaka Chettis, as opposed to the larger and more prominent Chinese *Peranakan* or Portuguese *Peranakan* community members within the same state. Now, becoming ever smaller in numbers, most of the surviving members of the Melaka Chetti community live in the modern state of Melaka, Malaysia in a small village in the middle of Melaka city called *Kampung Chetti* or Chetti Village. Yet, this unique community of Malaysian *Peranakan* people vigorously continue to keep their living traditions alive.

As the descendants of seafarers from the Indian sub-continent who married local women of the Malay World (Gopal, 2017; Hoerder, 2002), the Melaka Chetti people naturally adopted the local lingua franca *bahasa Melayu* or Malay as their first language together with the *adat* (or literally, customs) of the Malay people, their mannerisms and most interestingly, their literary prowess. Not only did the Melaka Chettis successfully adopt the literary traditions of the Malay people whom they met and lived with, they also adapted the language and literary forms of the Malay people to become part of their own unique hybrid identity. Without a shadow of doubt, the Malay pantuns of the Melaka Chettis are not a paradox or even a lesser form of Malay pantuns but they are the fusion of two unique worldviews and lived experiences (Adnan & Pillay, *forthcoming*). The traditional Melaka Chetti pantuns that we present and analyse in this study came from a focal source: The experiences and memories of one Madam Meenachi Genasamy, a nearly 90-year-old Melaka Chetti whom we met and regularly interviewed on-site over a period of more than one year. Madam Meenachi is currently acknowledged by the Malaysian government as a living custodian of Melaka Chetti Indians’ Malay literary heritage and also the music of ‘*Dondang Sayang*’, another exceptional traditional art form where Malay pantuns are lyricised into song and dance for entertainment purposes and social functions.

Significance and Structure of this Empirical Paper

This study makes a significant contribution to the Malay language literary canon, as it focuses on the traditional Malay pantuns of a minority group of people who use Malay as their first language but, at the same time, are not part of the majority Malay-Muslim language speakers in the Malay World of Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. The systematic and painstaking process to document the Malay language pantuns of the Melaka Chetti people are detailed in this study together with some notable Malay pantuns from this uniquely Malaysian and Southeast Asian community. To truly appreciate the uniqueness of Melaka Chetti Malay pantuns, in the next section, we review the long history and traditions of the Malay pantun literary form. Then, we discuss the place of pantun in the everyday life of Melaka Chettis from our one-year plus fieldwork in *Kampung Chetti* or Chetti Village (Figure 1). Finally, we present some notable traditional



Figure 1. Boundary marker for Kampung Chetti or Chetti Village in the state of Melaka, Malaysia

Melaka Chetti Malay pantuns that we managed to collect from our extensive qualitative fieldwork and critically examine the literary and social meanings that they carry, as an embodiment of the unique hybrid identity of the Melaka Chetti Indian people derived from their worldviews and lived experiences in the Malay world.

THE STORY AND THE 'HISTORIES' OF MALAY PANTUNS

There is no doubting the popularity of the pantun as a poetic form, both spoken and written. As one of Malaysia’s leading scholar of pantun observes, the Malay pantun is considered as “the most dynamic single literary form and [the pantun also] has the longest history” (Salleh, 2011b, p. 78), spreading from the centre of the Malay World that is Malaysia, Indonesia and also Brunei to the rest of Southeast Asia and around the globe. It is believed that the pantun form can be found in at least 50 Malay dialects and another 35 languages around the world (Salleh, 2014). The simplicity of the pantun form is its beauty, leading to its enduring popularity within Malaysian society (Ding, 2009). Yet, the pantun is more than a play on language; pantuns are reflections of life and living in places that have embraced its poetic form (Chambert-Loir, 1994). Depending on the social context and geographical location they are found, pantuns can be a form of entertainment as riddles or as children’s musical melodies (Asha’ari, 1961) but pantuns can also play the role of allegories and proverbs, and as a sociohistorical vessel to preserve the many unwritten rules of the Malay *adat* or customs (Semara, 2005). Below is a famous classical Malay pantun.

<i>Pulau Pandan nun jauh ke tengah</i>	Pandan Island at the middle of the sea
<i>Gunung Daik bercabang nan tiga</i>	Daik Mountain it has three peaks
<i>Hancurlah badan dikandung tanah</i>	Though the body is crushed in the ground
<i>Budi nan baik terkenang jua</i>	Virtuous deeds will never be forgotten

Like many traditional Malay pantuns, the original creator or author of *this* pantun that gives good moral and ethical advice is unknown. What is clear from this pantun is that, psychologically, the lyrical properties of pantun quatrains make them easy to memorise and recall. It is not surprising then, pantuns that offer sound advice are amongst the most timeless, especially for the younger generation. In contemporary Malaysia, tech-savvy youngsters continue to use pantuns even on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Snowden, 2012) for the pantun form remains perpetually relevant. Pantuns can be funny or witty and they can contain advice or even sarcasm (Ahmad, 1990; Noor, 2010). Pantuns can also show the ecstasy of falling in love and the hurt of falling out of it (Hassan, Said & Mohd., 2005; Salleh, 2011a), as in the next example.

<i>Dualah tiga kucing berlari</i>	Two and three cats go running around
<i>Tidakkan sama si kucing nan belang</i>	They're unmatched to one with stripes
<i>Dua tiga kan boleh dicari</i>	Two or three companions might I find
<i>Tidakkan sama cik adik seorang</i>	None is comparable to you, my dearest

Reading the surface structure, this is just a pantun about playful felines. That being said, this timeless Malay pantun actually portrays the act of traditional courtship between a man and a woman, through the beauty, charm, and finesse of the Malay language. The idea that the woman is beyond compare should be more than enough as a way for the man to court her within this traditionally rich society. Hence, it is only apt that the woman replies with her own pantun, perhaps by reciting another classical one, as translated by Daillie (1988) below.

<i>Jika tidaklah kerana bintang</i>	If 'tis not for the stars above
<i>Tak akan si bulan terbit tinggi</i>	How would the moon venture high
<i>Jika tidaklah kerana abang</i>	If 'tis not for you, one true love
<i>Masakan adik datang ke mari?</i>	Why should I venture nigh?

In actual fact, the potential of the pantun form to express the conditions of life and living are limitless (see Daillie, 1988; Md. Nor & Kaeh, 1985; Mohamed, 2006). Even though the 'a and b plus a and b' rhyme scheme in a conventional pantun might seem too linguistically constrictive compared to free-form modern poetry for instance, this convention actually adds to the beauty and charm of Malay pantuns. Below is an example of a pantun recorded by Salleh (2011b) near the general area of our university campus in the state of Perak in the northern region of Peninsula Malaysia. This evergreen pantun mentions a geographical area called 'Lambor' and it "describes how the earth of Lambor is quite swampy but also fertile. If you choose to settle there, then you should [ideally] come with your life partner" (Salleh, 2011b, p. 91).

<i>Tanah di Lambor tanahnya lembah</i>	The grounds of Lambor are in a valley
<i>Tanamlah keduduk bercabang dua</i>	Plant the rhododendron with two branches
<i>Memang Lambor tanah nan bertuah</i>	'Tis true Lambor is indeed blessed
<i>Kalau nak duduk mestilah berdua</i>	Whoever comes must bring a partner

Imagine from the outset, the creativity of the anonymous original author of these four lines and the underlying message that the author is really trying to convey. Because of these four short lines, the listener or reader should be able to imagine the physical beauty of Lambor and to begin to appreciate the cultural landscape of a strange place that she or he might never see in his or her lifetime (N. Ismail, Ariffin, S. Ismail, Yunos, & Utaberta, 2015). The beauty, charm, and versatility of pantuns actually mean that anyone can create their own pantuns on whatever topic that they choose, and as a way to both demonstrate and project their Malay language identities (see Adnan, 2005, 2013a). A pantun can be about dreams, emotions, hopes, inspirations or a multitude of other human experiences. At the same time, it is possible to construct a pantun about love, life and living or perhaps the pantun creator might want to be witty with a healthy dash of sarcasm so as to impart moral and ethical lessons in a subtle way. But, most importantly, when it comes to learning to create, and to write or to recite the pantun form, no one needs to worry about making mistakes as the pantun below teaches us.

<i>Bawa galah ke kebun si Banjar</i>	Take a pole to the Banjarese orchard
<i>Mahu jolok buah jambu batu</i>	In order to pick some guavas
<i>Awak budak kan baru belajar</i>	You're a child who's starting to learn
<i>Belajar pantun satu persatu</i>	So, learn the pantun one line at a time

This uniquely Melaka Chetti '*pantun nasihat*' or pantun of advice was shared by our focal research participant, Madam Meenachi. This particular pantun gives good guidance to anyone who is just starting to learn something new, employing pantun as a case in point. The four lines above also serve as a reminder about the position of Malay pantuns in the everyday life of Melaka Chettis, as the next section will summarise from the life histories and group discussions textual records that we managed to build during our extensive qualitative fieldwork. All one-to-one interviews, focus group discussion sessions, and supplementary data collection were carried out in the Malay language to preserve the authenticity of our exchanges (see, for example, Abu Kassim & Adnan, 2005; Adnan, 2010; Karib & Adnan, 2005; Mustafa & Adnan, 2009). For all intents and purposes of this empirical paper, we translated the direct quotes and Melaka Chetti Malay pantuns into English to the best of our knowledge of both languages and in line with the formal conventions of academic and literary translations, to preserve their meanings.

MALAY PANTUNS AND THE MELAKA CHETTIS

The most interesting social aspect about the Melaka Chettis is how much they have assimilated the Malay way of life although they hold steadfastly to their own *Saivite* Hindu beliefs (see Pillai, 2015; Sinha, 2011). The womenfolk are normally attired in the Malay '*kebaya*' and '*kain batik lepas*' or sarong while their foreheads are adorned with '*pottu*', the red religious mark that is typically Indian. In addition, they also have typical Indian names, not Malay ones. Meanwhile,

the menfolk wear ‘*baju Melayu*’ with sarong. Their mother tongue is Malay, albeit a distinctive form of Malay creole which has diluted to become more like modern Malay language over the years. The social foundations of this Malay creole are not merely for everyday conversations because the Melaka Chettis have also mastered the literary aspects of Malay language and they are very well versed in Malay literary forms like the ‘*dondang sayang*’, ‘*serampang laut*’, ‘*syair*’ and of course, the evergreen pantun form to mention but a few (see Haji Ismail & Arifin, 2016).

Traditional Melaka Chitty or Chetti weddings of the past had ‘*joget lambak*’ and ‘*ronggeng*’ (both are dance forms for socialising and community-based entertainment) as part of the festivities before modernisation eroded this social practice. Their everyday conversations are spontaneously coloured with Malay idioms, Malay proverbs, Malay similes, and also Malay metaphors. In fact, some words that are considered archaic in modern Malay language are still widely used within this hybrid community to this day. As it is within the Malay community, pantuns continue to play a role as a form of folk poetry within the Melaka Chetti community. Pantuns are a way of implying implicit messages or teaching moral values and it remains as a safe way of navigating around sensitive social issues; some pantuns are also used as euphemisms to maintain politeness, which is an important value to be upheld in this dwindling community.

Many elements of the Melaka Chetti culture, worldview and social values can be traced back to their unique Malay pantuns. Reciting the pantuns spontaneously is proof of how well-versed the members of the community are in the Malay language and how much they have internalised the Malay way of life, whilst simultaneously maintaining their traditional Hindu beliefs and religious practices. In the next and last section of this empirical paper, we present some classical Melaka Chetti Malay pantuns and critically examine the literary and social meanings that they carry, as an embodiment of the hybrid identity and unique worldview of the Melaka Chetti Indians. According to Madam Meenachi, the focal source of these exclusive pantuns, there are several notable pantun genres within the Melaka Chetti community based on their sociohistories and lived experiences. Within the limits of this empirical paper, we will only cover two popular genres in the next section: ‘*Pantun budi*’ and ‘*pantun nasihat*’.

THE MALAY PANTUNS OF THE MELAKA CHETTIS

From our many conversations with Madam Meenachi and also the other ‘oldtimers’ (see Lave & Wenger, 1991) from the original families that settled in Kampung Chetti, Melaka, the Melaka Chettis seem to hold quite a pragmatic stance when it comes to Malay pantuns. As Madam Meenachi explained to us, in Melaka at least, “pantuns belong to each and every one of us including the Malays, the Peranakan Indians (Melaka Chettis), the Peranakan Chinese (or the *Baba dan Nyonya*) and also the Peranakan Portuguese.” Due to this, it is quite impossible for any one of these four groups to claim certain pantuns exclusively as their own literary heritage. All

the same, because of the extended and extensive one-year plus fieldwork that we carried out, and based on data triangulation from repeated interviews, group discussions and analysis cycles (see Adnan, 2001, 2017a, 2017b; Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney & Fehler-Cabral, 2020; Jentoft, & Olsen, 2019) with surviving senior members of the Melaka Chetti community, we are inclined to posit that the Malay pantuns below not only belong to the Melaka Chetti Indians but they also portray the literary prowess of Madam Meenachi, her contemporaries and their ancestors who settled on the Malay Peninsula hundreds of years ago.

Malay Pantuns of the Melaka Chettis: ‘Pantun Budi’

The modern literal translation of the word ‘*budi*’ is courteousness. It is also interesting to note that the original meaning of the Sanskrit word ‘*buddhi*’ is intellect or, more correctly, the ability to know the right thing to do, at the right time and in the right context. Within the Malay World, the concept of *budi* is a unique construct that carries several meanings related to being courteous, being gracious and returning kindness to whomsoever has shown kindness and has done a good deed (unto us). Those who live in the Malay World know that *budi* is intertwined with the *adat*, which literally means culture or way of life. According to Madam Meenachi, “those who don’t return [reciprocate in kind] the *budi* of others are considered people who are insolent because they don’t understand our old *adat*.” It is thus not surprising that there are many pantuns related to the notion of *budi* that have been shared and reshared within the Melaka Chetti community. Five of the treasured *pantun budi* of the Melaka Chetti Indians are presented and explained below, from the lived experiences of Madam Meenachi and the worldview of her hybrid community.

<i>Kupu-kupu si rama-rama</i>	Butterflies and more butterflies
<i>Hinggap mari pohon berduri</i>	Land upon a thorny tree
<i>Budi dikenang selama-lama</i>	Your <i>budi</i> ‘tis cherished forever
<i>Budi bukan sebarang budi</i>	For your <i>budi</i> is beyond compare

Within the Malay world, as in the Melaka Chetti community, a person’s *budi* must not just be returned in kind but also cherished and celebrated as a sign of good nature and positive upbringing. The imagery of beautiful butterflies landing on a thorny tree strengthens the notion of *budi* as a thing of beauty and a deed that is done even when one is faced with difficult challenges. It can be argued that the inability to perform deeds of *budi* and to return them is a sign of an evil society. The same imagery is repeated in the next pantun.

<i>Kupu-kupu si rama-rama</i>	Butterflies and more butterflies
<i>Hinggap mari pohon mengkawan</i>	Land upon a palmy tree Since you said that I’m
<i>Tuan menegur saya peramah</i>	gracious
<i>Sama-samalah kita berkawan</i>	Let us now both become friends

In this particular pantun, the beginnings of a bond of friendship is addressed. Strong social bonds akin to familial ties are not strange within the Melaka Chetti community.

This is due to the fact that members of the community hail from common ancestry and strong social bonds are shared within the community to this day. The serene image of butterflies this time projects the notion of fleeting beauty within the friendship between two new friends. In the words of Madam Meenachi: "Even though they are so pretty, butterflies die quite quickly, right? It's the same when it comes to friendships because even the most beautiful friendships can be just temporary because we all will die in the end."

<i>Tenang setenang air di laut</i>	Keep calm waters of the sea
<i>Sampan kecil mudik keanjung</i>	A small boat rows to the cape
<i>Hati yang kenang mulut punsebut</i>	The heart recalls the lips chant
<i>Baik budi ingin nak junjung</i>	A deed of budi we must elevate

In the pantun above, Madam Meenachi explained to us, "in reality a deed of *budi* isn't something that is easily forgotten or ignored within my community" and indeed for others who live in the Malay World. When one person becomes indebted to the *budi* of another person, the former must appreciate and cherish the very good deed of the latter. Even across the seas, the *budi* must be carried in a person's heart and it must always be kept in that person's memories until an opportunity presents itself for this very good deed to be paid or returned, in kind. This same mindset is present in the following pantun.

<i>Anak serindit di atas ranting</i>	A baby lorikeet sits on a branch
<i>Patah ranting jatuh ke lombong</i>	The branch breaks fall into a mine
<i>Wang dan ringgit kita penting</i>	We prioritise money and wealth
<i>Budi dan jasa kita sanjung</i>	We eulogise budi and great service

Within all human communities, the Melaka Chettis included, great importance is placed on money and wealth not merely for social standing but also to ensure the survival of the community. This being said, the value of the *budi* is even higher compared to money and wealth, so much so that it is eulogised and viewed with great reverence. The imagery of a magnificent and colourful lorikeet with its sweet and affectionate avian demeanour further strengthens the underlying message of this particular pantun.

<i>Baik bergalas baiklah tidak</i>	It can be carried or be it not
<i>Buli-buli yang bertali benang</i>	A gourd tied to a thread
<i>Baik berbalas baiklah tidak</i>	A budi be it returned or not
<i>Asalkan budi sama dikenang</i>	One must be able to recollect

In this last example of Melaka Chetti pantun *budi*, Madam Meenachi clarified that in some situations, within her own community or society at large, it is perhaps difficult or even impossible for a person to return or repay a deed of *budi*. This, however, does not mean that the *budi* should not be remembered and cherished. Like a gourd tied to a piece of thread, such is the heft of *budi* on someone's shoulders and that person must try as hard as possible to return that very good deed in kind or at least cherish it with fond memories. In her own words: "What kind of human being are you if you don't respect and repay other people's *budi*? For me

personally, it is our *budi* that makes us different from members of the animal kingdom."

Malay Pantuns of the Melaka Chettis: 'Pantun Nasihat'

As stated in the introductory sections, the literary medium of pantun is generally able to provide good advice and to inculcate positive values for the peoples of the Malay World, especially within the lives of the younger generation. Because of this, according to Madam Meenachi, one popular genre of pantun is called '*pantun nasihat*' (literally, advice). It is specifically meant to give good advice to the listener or reader. Within the Melaka Chetti community, amongst the chief uses of pantun *nasihat* are to remind the younger generation of Melaka Chettis to be well-mannered and to show deference to their elders. As such, these pantuns are laden with ethical, moral, and universal values. Without a doubt, advice given through the beautiful language of pantuns brings a more lasting effect on the listener or reader compared to harsh verbal cautions or warnings. Five of the treasured pantun *nasihat* of the Melaka Chetti Indians are presented and critically explained in this subsection.

<i>Buah salak di atas bukit</i>	Snake fruits growing on a hill
<i>Orang Asli menggali tanah</i>	Local natives digging the earth
<i>Anjing menyalak di kaki bukit</i>	A dog barking at the foot of the hill
<i>Mentari takkan jatuh ke tanah</i>	Won't make the sun fall onto the earth

In this first example, the last two stanzas of the pantun are a common advice dispensed in the Malay World and also within the Melaka Chetti community. The message is clear, no matter how hard the dog barks it is nigh impossible for the sun to fall onto the earth. And thus, as the advice goes, every person should avoid any kinds of labour or behaviours that at best will be in vain or at worse will lead to some kind of emotional hurt or physical harm. There are indeed some efforts that must be avoided for they will lead to little or no gain in the end. The same line of argument is taken up by another pantun, below.

<i>Peria pahit dibuat ulam</i>	Bitter gourd is eaten raw
<i>Makan mari berbuka puasa</i>	Let us eat to break our fast
<i>Barang tak baik jangan diulang</i>	Bad deeds mustn't be repeated
<i>Ulang juga kan rosak binasa</i>	If repeated they'll lead to ruin

As related by Madam Meenachi, "eating raw bitter gourd is a picture to teach all of us about the bitterness of bad or evil deeds." Therefore, in this Melaka Chetti Malay pantun, the advice is literal and needs no allusions; anyone who repeatedly does bad things is only asking for trouble, as nothing good could ever come from such bad deeds or negative behaviours. This is not just a reminder to the young, but it is also applicable to the old, and it is only logical for a person to avoid such bad karma from the outset. The next pantun in this subsection was already shared, earlier. However, there are slight differences in this particular version. Madam Meenachi made this clear to us: "The real magic of pantun is that there can be many versions of the same pantun. We're allowed to do this depending on what we're thinking and

our own mood.... That's also why it's hard to claim which pantun belongs to whom."

<i>Bawa galah ke kebun Banjar</i>	Bring a pole to the Banjarese orchard
<i>Mahu menjolok si jambu batu</i>	For you to pick some guavas
<i>Awak budak baru belajar</i>	You're a child who's starting to learn
<i>Belajarlah pantun satu-satu</i>	So, learn to pantun one line at a time

This third pantun *nasihat* gives very good advice to an individual who is just starting her or his journey of knowledge. Like everything else in life, all positive endeavours need patience and time. Whilst here, learning pantun is given as the example, in truth, whatever is learned needs to be learned in sequence so that the knowledge gained will be deep and lasting. In addition, when it comes to learning, all of us are like kids who start with little or no knowledge about the world around us. In the words of Madam Meenachi: "We shouldn't become like foolish children who want to rush into things or children who think they already know so much, when in truth their knowledge is very limited compared to people who are more experienced." Another pantun that relates to knowledge and learning is presented below.

<i>Kalau tuan pergi ke pasar</i>	If you sir go to the market
<i>Belikan saya sayur petola</i>	Please buy me some loofah vegetables
<i>Sambil berpantun sambil belajar</i>	When creating pantun we also learn
<i>Ibarat budak masih sekolah</i>	Like children who art still in school

Madam Meenachi told us that the message in this particular pantun is related to the previous one, in terms of the process of learning and gaining life experiences. It is also interesting to note that the medium of pantun is linked to the notion of learning, in that both will lead to the acquisition of useful knowledge about life. Hence, like little children who are still in school, by creating beautiful stanzas of pantun we can actually learn new things about life and living. The last pantun *nasihat* is presented next and it is one of the most famous pantuns ever created with slight differences in word choice from one community to the next.

<i>Sayangkan cempedak di luar pagar</i>	Sadly, the jackfruit is outside the fence
<i>Ambillah galah tolonglah jolokkan</i>	Please get a pole and pick it for me
<i>Sayalah budak yang baru belajar</i>	I'm but a child who's starting to learn
<i>Apa yang salah tolonglah tunjukkan</i>	Right from wrong oh please teach me

Still, on the notion of learning and knowledge, this pantun *nasihat* uses the imagery of a helpless child who needs the assistance of other adults to teach her or him right from wrong. The fact that the child is asking for help is also a very strong advice because the formal learning process involves some sort of mentoring and tutelage. Besides, for a child who is just embarking on a lifetime journey of learning perhaps his or her first lessons should be about what is right and what is wrong.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The traditional Malay pantuns of the Melaka Chetti Indian community in Malaysia are a literary treasure trove and notable inclusion into the Malay literary canon. Even though it could be argued that the ownership of Malay pantuns will always be a point of contention between the many ethnic groups within the Malay World and outside of it, in truth, some pantuns *do* belong and can be traced back to a certain group of people, as the beautiful examples above have illustrated. The Malay pantuns of the Melaka Chetti people not only embody the art and exquisiteness of the Malay language and Malay literature, they also project the distinctive hybrid identity and worldview of the Melaka Chetti Indians in Malaysia.

Perhaps in the years to come the original bloodlines of the Melaka Chettis, as Madam Meenachi sees it, will cease to exist due to the prevalence of mixed marriages and the high emigration rates of the younger generation of Melaka Chettis looking for greener pastures outside of Malaysian borders. Hopefully by then, the treasure trove of Melaka Chetti Malay pantuns will survive, *if* these pantuns are systematically collected and archived for Malaysian generations to come. And, when that time comes, as Madam Meenachi proudly proclaimed, all of us must remember her special Melaka Chetti pantun below:

<i>Anaklah Cina menjual tauhu</i>	Chinese children selling tofu
<i>Jual pula Gula Melaka</i>	They sell palm sugar too
<i>Kalau si tuan mahu tahu</i>	If you sir really want to know
<i>Sayalah orang Chetti Melaka!</i>	I'm a Chetti who's from Melaka!

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