



## BIRD ELEMENT SYMBOLISM IN MALAY PROVERBS

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## ABSTRACT

*Proverb is an important component in the traditional Malay poetry which shapes Malay courtesy and values that have become part of their daily life. Malay proverbs stem from the Malay minds which are adequately sensitive to the surroundings, including the flora and fauna. This explains why animal antics and behaviour are interpreted in proverbs comparatively with human attitude. Animal-related proverbs can be found in almost all cultures. The Malay's life experiences with these animals have given a broad scope of knowledge on the habit and behaviour of the animals. This is why human attitude and behaviour are inseparable from those of the animals. Thus, these animals are depicted with various symbols representing their physical characteristics and behaviour signified figuratively and compared with those of humans.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs make a very important component in the traditional Malay poetry, as they shape the values in Malay people that have been ingrained in their everyday lives. The Malay people have been acknowledged as a society that is very courteous and well-mannered. Figurative in proverbs illustrate just how refined these values are in Malays as they deliver certain messages. Malay people would take utmost care of their speeches so they will not hurt others. Thus, proverbs have been used as a tool to convey meaning and elaborate on civilization. Malay proverbs originate from the Malay minds that are very sensitive to their surroundings, including the flora and fauna. For the traditional societies, the expansive universe serves as an invaluable teacher that teaches them about life and gives them worthwhile lessons.

## 2. MALAY PROVERBS

Malay Proverbs is one of the assets of the Malay Language used to deliver hidden or clear messages. Various definitions have been given to proverbs which common characteristics are that they are full of advice, messages and wisdom. Proverbs is, all brief speech arrangements that have been uttered by people for quite some time, they are pleasant to say and the words are wisely selected, they are wide-ranging and the propose is genuine, used and uttered by people for comparison, examples and lessons. Listeners will understand what it means, but they will normally need lengthier explanation.

Proverbs that we can find in a community of a nation would tend to reflect the state of the community in itself. Through sayings, figurative speeches or appearances that we have in that society, we will know the intellect and the material that has been achieved by the society. Proverbs is a form of speech that can be greatly found in old literature and as a representation of how we thought back then. Their very close relationship with the nature has created an inspiration and mirrors of comparison for them, especially prominent thinkers at the time. A scholar of old literature, proverbs as a bonding of language spoken in short verses and it shows the original meaning through satire and metaphors (Ariffin, 1971). According to him, proverbs emerge together with traditional society who reflects the patterns of thought, basis of actions, laws and customs.

In reality, in this fast-paced world, everything seems to be measured by money caused Malay people to seldom use proverbs in their everyday speeches and social functions. Proverbs are no longer important, let alone used. He had the opinion that, the younger generation regarded proverbs as a cliché used by the elderly as materials for their speeches and talks, and in customary events. Some are of the opinion that proverbs are no longer appropriate with the current circumstances. The aspect of proverbs has become less of a priority. Teenagers today, who are living in the world of science and technology are more comfortable with language that is regarded as modern, non-classic and not having any element of old Malay Language.

### 2.1. Birds and Their Symbolism in Malay Proverbs

Generally speaking, symbols are defined as signs that state or introduce a particular symbol or sign. Symbolism associated with the act of using something as a symbol. Symbolism is one way of communicating in an implicit manner. The language of symbolism is the earliest and the oldest, and it has become prevalent in the Malay society. The use of the symbolism system distinguishes the pattern of human behavior from the pattern of animal behavior.

Birds are vertebrate animals comprising of various species. A bird has a head, body, wing, feet and tail. The larger part of its body is grown with fur except for the legs and the beak. The fur can come in various wonderful, fascinating colors. The fur also protects the bird from exposed to the sunlight and rain. This animal is also warm-blooded and has light, porous bones that can reduce the birds' density and the weight. Among other characteristics of a bird is that its body is covered with feathers, it has a beak, it is toothless, the feet have scales, it lays eggs and it also breathes using lungs (Yatim, 2001). Although a lot of birds are able to fly, but there are species that cannot fly such as ostrich, kiwi, quail and penguin. Other than that, livestock, birds such as fowls, duck and goose. Birds are also known as *mergastua* and *unggas*. This animal is often metaphorically used to justify human behavior and idiosyncrasies.

In Malay proverbs, birds are often symbolized as something that are free, trapped, chirping and associated with bad or happy news, birds who find food like paddy and enemies that threaten them. Birds that fly away in the sky and not having anything getting in the way are described as, *bebassepertiburung* which explains one's lifestyle that is free from normal regulations or restrictions. Freedom has its limit because too much freedom will become detrimental to ourselves. Birds are often associated with news of some kind because back then, birds were used as messengers as their feet were tied with letters and the birds will fly to the recipients.

Other than that, there are also birds which accompany other animals called *burunggembalakerbau* (*burungkesumba*), *gembalaharimau* (*kesumba*), *gembalagajah* (*burungkambing*) dan *burungpingai* related to the spirit of the deceased. The birds cited in the proverbs are those kept by the Malay for instance *ketitir*, *balam*, *merbuk*, *tempuadanmerpati* (pigeons). This is because Malays have made birds, their pet and bird-watching, rip-arresting, bird-trapping; in the forests were the side-jobs for them as their pastime. Such a long-standing activity caused them to become more careful and make them have more expertise in this area.

Birds are also among the animals which most frequently noted in the Quran including the one in *the Chapter of al-Nahl*, verse 79 which means:

*Do they not look at the birds, held poised in the midst of (the air and) the sky? Nothing holds them up but (the power of) Allah. Verily in this are signs for those who believe.*

In the Malay proverbs there are 175 birds mentioned in the proverbs which represent various symbols. Meanwhile, there are 37 proverbs which mention the names of birds, including the chicken, duck and goose which are also species of birds. Table 1 shows the types of birds that can be found in Malay proverbs.

Types of Birds in Malay Proverbs

No.	Names of Birds (In Malay)	Frequency	Good Values	Bad Values
1.	Belatuk	1	Loyal	X
2.	Berek-berek	1	Cooperative	X
3.	Cemperling	1		Acting as if one is rich
4.	Cenderawasih	1	Living in luxury	X
5.	Ciak	1		Deceitful
6.	Denak	1	Brave, strong	X
7.	Hantu	1	X	Weak
8.	Hering	1	X	Evil
9.	Jampuk	1	X	Unfortunate
10.	Tempua	1	X	Sleek
11.	Tiung	1	Goodness	X
12.	Berkik	1	X	Evil
13.	Layang-layang	1	X	Unfortunate
14.	Kuang	2	X	Unfortunate
15.	Serindit	2	X	X
16.	Kedidi	2	X	Not knowing how to take care of oneself, evil
17.	Kuau	2	X	Unfortunate
18.	Bayan	3	Different culture	Unfortunate
19.	Merbah	3	X	Unfortunate, ordinary person
20.	Nuri	3	X	Weak
21.	Kuaran	4	X	Pointless, disappointed
22.	Jentayu	5		Pointless actions
23.	Garuda	5	Power and high rank	X
24.	Murai	5	An expert, time	Very talkative
25.	Pungguk	5	X	Pointless actions, bad
26.	Merak	6	X	Arrogant
27.	Merpati	6	Peace, good at taking care of oneself, loyal	X
28.	Punai	7	X	Weak,
29.	Bangau	8	Self-integrity	Selfish, indecisive, jealous
30.	Puyuh	8	X	Pretentious, unfulfilled dream /intention
31.	Tekukur, Ketitir, Balam, Merbuk	8	Obedient, Profitable	Easily forgets, arrogant, uncooperative, selfish
32.	Helang	13	Fast, strong, powerful, rank, wealth	X
33.	Gagak	14	X	Ugly, has weakness, unfulfilled dream, hard to change
34.	Pipit ( <i>Estrilidae</i> )	17	Hardworking	Small, weak, poor
35.	Itik	20	X	Late, pointless actions, weak, stubborn, disdain, boastful, unknowledgeable, lazy
36.	Ayam ( <i>Gallus</i> )	200	Intellectual, promising, easy, luxurious, fast, and close relationship	Poor, cowardice, prostitute, revolting, disdain, diseased, weak, evil, lazy, irresponsible, Unfortunate, stupid, foe, coward
37.	Angsa	1	Rich person	X

Source: Malay Literary Reference Center ([www.prpm.dbp.gov.my](http://www.prpm.dbp.gov.my))

The choice of birds mentioned in proverbs has specific characteristics normally attached to the birds. A pretty bird would symbolize a person of high rank and status, whereas less attractive birds represent people who are poor or have low social status. The peacock is said to have an immeasurable beauty, and thus, it is associated with the trait of

arrogance. A comparison is drawn by referring to the feather of the peacock, which is very unique compared to other birds. Its behavior, showing off its beautiful feather is really to seek for attention and to find a mate. There are actually people who adopt such attitude, being like a peacock spreading its fur in the forests to attract the attention of others. Several proverbs on the peacock have been illustrated in the proverbs below:

Proverbs	Meaning
<i>Merakkayangan</i>	A beautiful woman who is so desired, but will never be won
<i>Keranacenderawasih, merakemasdilepaskan</i>	After getting a new love, the old one is let go

Unlike the sparrow, the spotted dove and the crow are categorized as birds of low status. Our analysis shows that the sparrow is very frequently mentioned in the proverbs flowed by the crow, the eagle and the hornbill. This demonstrates that the relationship between the common people, or small birds like the sparrow and the crow, and the people in power like strong, powerful birds like the eagle and the hornbill. The hornbill shows the high status and position (Jalaluddin, 2014). The selection of the hornbill and not other birds refers to the specialty of this bird in the Malay society. It has a rather big body, like a turkey, and the way it flies also demonstrates its strength. Normally, the hornbill will fly pass the shoots of trees and only make friends in a small group, not more than 10 of them. The grandeur of this bird is illustrated in the following proverbs:

Proverbs	Meaning
<i>Sepertihelangmenyongsongangin</i>	About a greatness of a warrior as he fights against his enemy
<i>Makananengganghendakdimakanoleh pipit</i>	Wanting to do something that is unequal
<i>Burung pipit samaenggang, manakanbolehterbangbersama</i>	A relationship that does not match will not be salvaged
<i>Enggang sama enggang juga, pipit sama pipit</i>	Getting married to another person who is deemed suitable

If the eagle is symbolized as someone in power, the sparrow is depicted as commoners. The sparrow is a species of a small bird that flies in big number and often stops at paddy sticks. The nest is built on some low trees in the bushes near the paddy fields and forests. The sparrow likes to eat ripened paddy. In proverbs which use the sparrow as a symbol, opined that, this bird serves as a reminder of the status or position of a person. The difference of status can be seen in terms of asset ownership, rank, or even the person's own descent. See person of low status cannot be equated with individuals of higher status. For example, the lifestyle of the rich cannot be equated with that of the poor. Based on the proverbs studied, the sparrow has become the metaphor to small people, or those who have no power, weak, poor and lacking in many things. The proverbs below exemplify these traits:

Proverbs	Meaning
<i>Pipit berperangdenganhelangdan pipit berperangdengeroda</i>	Small people fighting against big people.
<i>Pipit meminanganakenggang</i>	The poor having the intention to marry the rich
<i>Burung pipit danhelangmanabilehterbangbersama</i>	Referring to the difference in status and opinions.

Other than that, the crow is the second most frequently mentioned bird in Malay proverbs. The crow, or its scientific name *Corvus M. macrorhynchos*, likes the land better because it is easier for it to find food. It is seldom found on an island, let alone at sea not like the seagull which loves the wind. The whole body of the crow is black and it feeds off carcasses. Black is associated with evil and so is the metaphor concerning the color of the crow. As it has some negative traits, it is linked with humans who have bad attitudes, are ugly, find it difficult to change, and stick with old habits. The following are the proverbs on the crow:

Proverbs	Meaning
<i>Hitamgagaktiadasiapa yang mencelupnya</i>	Showing a crow's trait- it is naturally black in color
<i>Gagakdimandikantujuh kali seharisekalipun, takkanputihbulunya</i>	Symbolizing that people with bad intention, although being told off or advised, they will not change
<i>Bagaigagakmenggonggongtelur</i>	Crows are also symbolized as a very ugly creature

Other than the crow which feeds off carcasses, a bird named herring also eats carcasses. According to Herring is big and the larger part of its body is white with the fur on its head, wings and tail grey or black (Hamzah and Hassan, 2011). This species is a predator and often, it will become the first bird to smell fresh carcasses. Carcasses are dead animals and they normally produce very bad smell. It also eats off remnants of animals collected by the local people after slaughtering for fertilizers. Only flies and maggots would feed off the carcasses as their food source. Predators are animals which meat is inedible. Thus, based on detailed observation by the societies, they created the proverb *adabangkaiadalahherring* which means where there are bad women around; there will also be bad men around. In this proverb, it shows that the bad women implied are prostitutes symbolized as carcasses, while the herring symbolizes bad men who frequent the brothel or prostitution place.

Next, the swan is a type of bird that is white and it has long legs and neck. For the Malay society, the swan is a bird that likes to travel from one place to another. The swan is symbolized as a commoner who is on the commute or who travels to find sustenance at other places (Ahmad, 2009). Proverbs using the swan remind us of people who travel and still remember their roots, although they are on to a better life. This reflects our own self-integrity who does not forget our own roots or where we come from. Swans is also symbolized as someone who travels far, who sees various interesting places abroad, and in the end he or she will still return their home country. They will return as in *setinggi-tinggiterbangbangauakhirnyahinggap di belakangkerbaujuga* and in the following verse:

*Kegungemaspasirbaiduri,  
kepadangzamrudhabis di edari;  
terbangbangausepanjanghari,  
ketasik juga akhirnyadicari.*

However, proverb *sepertibangaukasihkankerbau* one who is close with someone else only to get some benefits from the latter. A swan is a white-coloured bird and its neck is long. If we pass by a paddy field, we can see the swan eating with the bull. The latter will graze the grass while on its back, there will be the swan. *Di mana adakerbaudisitulah adabangau* shows the closeness of these two animals as in the proverb *sepertibangaukasihkankerbau*. In reality, the swan is feeding on the back of the bull. The bull will soak itself in the mud when its body is dry so there will be small fishes, leeches, fleas tucked on its body. These animals are the source of food for the swan. This bird will stay at the back of the cow or bull, or hopping around between the animals' legs to get the fleas and insects for its food.

This is why the swan always follows the bull wherever it goes as it can get something from the latter. This is the meaning of the proverb *sepertibangaukasihkankerbau* friendship formed because one will get a benefit from the friendship. However, *sepertibangaudiekorkerbau* refers to someone who is indecisive. *Bangau-bangaumintaakuleher, badak-badakmintaakudaging* shows someone who is jealous of someone else. This proverb clearly demonstrates the symbol of a swan who have a privilege of a long neck which is not possessed by other birds, while the hippo has a lot of meat. This makes other jealous and envious when they feel that they are lacking in the material aspect or status.

*Ketitir* and *merbah* are two birds that can be found in the bushes around the village. *Merbah* likes to eat cherries or a type of fruit called *senduduk*. In this proverb, it shows one's greediness, of grabbing everything he wants and finally he is the losing one. We should be grateful for everything granted by Allah, although what we get will be

blessed. In Malay proverbs we have a verse about the ketitir and merbah that has become the clue to one's greedy trait as mentioned in the verse below:

*Anakindunganakketitir,  
anakmerbahterlompat-lompat;  
yangdikendonghabistercicir,  
yangdikejar haram takdapat.*

Next, is a type of a night eagle better known as an owl from the family of *Tytonidae*. It is pale-looking and it has long legs and wings. In general, the Malay society knows this bird as one that is active at night and rests in its nest during the day (Ahmad, 2009). This bird is commonly found in villages especially close to the paddy field as its main food source is mice. This animal is increasingly active at night, especially when it is full moon. In a prose about the owl, the animal kingdom is translated into the human kingdom. The characters in this prose represent the traits and resemble human attitude. In this prose, we are introduced to the proverb *punggukrindukanbulan* envisioning the love of different status of people who has failed. The moon that is an epitome of a young girl with high status, and the owl is her lover of a lower status (Salleh, 2012). In this prose, the owl fails to woo the moon, or the lover he so desires. The owl is left behind, making plea and is unlucky in love. This proverb is cynical towards men and women who are missing their partner. Additionally, the owl has a very close relationship with the moon as the moon marks that it is already night time, the time when it is time for the owl to eat.

Next, *burungjampuk* is said to be another species of owl. Proverbs like *jampukkesianganharimeans* an owl which is awakened when the sun rises. It is characteristic of a bird to get active in the morning to look for food but when it is daytime, this bird will become restless because it is out of norm. This explains about a state of a person who is restless, loses his or her direction, loses his or her mind similar it the owl. Other than the owl, the magpie or *murai* depicts the situation of humans who talk a lot and make noise through the proverbs *mulutmurai* and *muraidicabutekor*. It is not nice for a woman to talk so much and talk loudly so much so that she disrupts other people's sense of peace. This is because the Malays appreciate moderation and humility when they talk. People's arrogance has been cited a lot in proverbs using elements of small birds like *cemperlingnakjadibayu* which means 'small', low-status people who resemble high-status people.

The story about the parakeet can be found in old arts, among which is the story of *Bayan Budiman*. Proverbs related to the parakeet explain about misfortune like *bayan di tanganhabisterlepas,niat di hatinakgetahbayan, sudahtergetahburungserindit*, meaning that you get something else than you wish for. *Kalauseasangarsekalipun, yang bayanitubayanjugaserinditdetapserinditjuga* is a reminder that humans are different, although they do come from the same family. According to *HikayatMerongMahawangsa* or *Sejarah Kedah* this bird is illustrated as trying to come in between the wedding of a Roman prince and a Chinese princess. This news is obtained by the great eagle, but the attempt failed despite the many steps taken to destruct the Roman army by the garuda. Because it was very arrogant and embarrassed by its failure in stopping the marriage, the garuda then flew in retreat and went into exile.

Next, the woodpecker or in Malay *burungbelatuk* is a type of bird which likes to eat on the snag, or a wood that is old and is waiting to collapse and fall to the ground. Although the bird knows that the snag is normally unsafe, it ignores the snag and keeps finding its food there. This bird likes to peck by knocking on the branch meaning to make its nest there. When the snag collapses, the woodpecker nesting in the branch especially its young will fall and die. This creates the proverb *punggurrebahbelatukmenumpangmatimeaning* that someone who is the protector or leader is in trouble when the young or his or her followers are also in trouble.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In Conclusion, the result of the experiment shows that, the using of proverb 'bird' as symbolism, brought the meaning as Malay's society who's applied all the animal's behavior in their daily life. The symbolism is one of the ways of Malay's communication, which associate it with something else based on their observations on the surrounding's environment and life experiences.

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