

# THE POWER OF THE CONCUBINE IN SELECTED TRADITIONAL MALAY HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LITERARY WORKS

## *(Kekuasaan Gundik dalam Teks Historiografi Sastra Melayu Terpilih)*

\*Wan Roshazli Wan Razali  
amsya\_gurlz@yahoo.com

Mohamad Luthfi Abdul Rahman  
luthfi@usm.my

Pusat Pengajian Ilmu Sains Kemanusiaan,  
Universiti Sains Malaysia.

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### Abstract

This study discusses the role of the concubine in selected traditional Malay literature, specifically *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* and *Hikayat Patani*, as these three works highlight several episodes that involve concubines, compared to other historiographical literary works. The objective of this study is to focus on concubine characters, which are seldom given attention or considered insignificant even though they have left a definite impact in specific situations. The concubine character will be discussed in terms of her power and role in the palace of the olden days. The study will also apply the theory of power as propounded by Lukes (1977) in analysing the role and concept of the concubine as put forth by Ismail Azman (2009). The significance of this study is the focus on the concubine character, which has been overlooked in favour of other main characters such as the king, the queen and the high official, among others. The concubine character in fact has her own standing, to the extent of impacting a particular government or state.

Keywords: Concubine, role and power, traditional Malay literature

### **Abstract**

*Kajian ini membincangkan watak gundik dalam karya kesusasteraan Melayu tradisional terpilih dengan merujuk beberapa buah teks historiografi, iaitu Sulalatus Salatin, Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai dan Hikayat Patani, ketiga-tiga teks ini dipilih kerana lebih menonjolkan beberapa peristiwa yang melibatkan gundik berbanding teks-teks historiografi yang lain. Objektif kajian adalah untuk mengetengahkan watak yang jarang diberikan perhatian dan dianggap kecil tetapi mampu memberikan impak tertentu dalam keadaan tertentu. Watak gundik ini akan dibincangkan melalui aspek kekuasaan dan peranannya dalam istana silam. Kajian ini juga akan menggunakan teori kuasa yang dikemukakan oleh Lukes (1977) yang akan dianalisis dengan melihat peranan gundik serta konsep gundik yang dikemukakan oleh Ismail Azman (2009). Kesignifikanan kajian ini mempamerkan satu aspek, iaitu watak yang kadangkala kelihatan tidak penting daripada watak utama yang lain seperti raja, permaisuri, pembesar dan sebagainya. Watak gundik ini mempunyai kedudukan tersendiri dan juga mampu memainkan peranan penting sehingga memberikan kesan kepada sesuatu pemerintahan.*

*Kata kunci: Gundik, peranan dan kekuasaan, sastera Melayu tradisional*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Historiographical literary works are not lacking in information about women. These works have introduced the readers to famous court ladies such as Tun Fatimah, Tun Kudu, Tun Teja, Wan Empuk, Wan Malini, Puteri Gunung Ledang and others. Previous studies on these women figures have concluded them to not only be somewhat helpless but also have their fates determined by men. These figures include Tun Kudu, Tun Teja Benggala, Tun Fatimah, Princess Hang Li Po, Tun Iram Sendari, Dang Bunga, Dang Bibah, Encik Apung and Puteri Tunjung Buih. Among the local scholars who have done research on this topic are: Ruzy Suliza in her book, *Out of The Shadows in Malay Court Narratives* (2003); Mana Sikana in his work, *Ikhtisar Kebudayaan dan Prosa Melayu Klasik* (2004), which discusses these women figures; and Cheah (1993) who also discusses these women figures in his article, "Power Behind the Throne: The Role of Queens and Court Ladies in Malay History". The author's analysis finds that previous scholars

have characterised these women figures as being docile and subdued, thus rendering them insignificant when they have actually succeeded in shaping several important events in the history of ancient Malay society.

This article aims to discuss the power of concubine characters as written in historiographical literary works with reference to the theory of power introduced by Lukes (1977). The theory of power emphasises the capability of an individual or a societal group to influence the action and thought of another individual or society in accordance with the former's needs through domination, influence, coercion, manipulation and authorisation. Power gives mandate to an authoritative individual to coerce another individual to do something against his will. It provides authority with control to influence others. Such a reality can be envisioned when someone makes decisions with the power that he possesses and manages to influence and dominate according to his desires (Lukes, 1985, p. 6).

According to Lukes (1978, p. 64), power leaves an impact as well as possibilities for human beings. It is not only able to influence human beings but also change history and the world. It is akin to "an actor's general ability" to ensure success. Weber (1914, p. 942) states that power is a complex quality and the risk of arousing conflict is very high. Therefore, it can be concluded that power is an individual's ability to do as he wants in social relationships even though there is opposition from others. Power is also the ability of a social class to achieve specific objectives (Poulantzas, 1914, p. 104). Therefore, with the views of these scholars as a starting point, this article discusses the role of the concubine character in historiographic literary works.

When discussing the role of a concubine, one immediately thinks of a kept woman or a secret lover of nobles in the past such as the king, the Sultan, members of the royal family as well as high officials. However, Ismail Azman provides a more in-depth definition of a concubine. He categorizes concubine into three groups: secondary wife, royal concubine and the ordinary concubine or concubine. Secondary wives are women who are not royalty but are married to the king or Sultan according to Islamic law (2009, p. 180); examples include Tun Ratna Wati, Tun Daerah and Tun Iram Sendari. Royal concubines are unofficial wives from among the common people. These women are not legally married to the king or Sultan but are kept women in the palace. They are also known as upper class concubines since they are kept and owned by the king in their own palace such as Dang Merta in *Hikayat Patani*, Dang Anum in *Sulalatus Salatin* and others unnamed

women mentioned in *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* and *Sulalatus Salatin*. The third group is the ordinary concubine or concubine. These women are not legally married to the Sultan or king. What differentiates the ordinary concubine from the royal concubine is that the former is neither owned nor maintained by the king; she lives in her own home. Ordinary concubines comprised widows or married women who are free and not tied to the king or officials such as Tun Dewi in *Sulalatus Salatin* (Ismail Azman, 2009, pp. 182-184). Secondary wives are in an exclusive position compared to the other two groups since the children they bear are recognised as the king's legitimate offspring and are bestowed titles such as *tengku*, *raja* and *puteri* (princess), according to their father's status. This theory is also supported by Muhd Yusoff (1992, p. 227): "The child she bore by the prince or ruler would be considered royalty and be given the title of *raja*". In fact, the bestowment of titles to children of concubines occurred not only in the Malay states or Nusantara but also in China and Korea, proving that kings having concubines was a universal practice and accepted by society in the olden days. The king's offspring with a concubine also became members of the royal family, occupying a position in the highest hierarchy similar to that of the official heirs. Even though the children of concubines were not appointed as the king's successor as priority was given to official heirs, there have been cases where they succeeded to the throne.

## THE ROLE OF THE CONCUBINE

This section examines and analyses the role of concubine characters in *Sulalatus Salatin*, *Hikayat Patani* and *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*, as they are more evident in these works compared to other historiographical literary works.

The activities of the concubines demonstrated that the work they performed are closely related to their skills, the first being their capability in running a household and the second being their sexual duties. Their tasks included managing the palace, preparing meals and serving as companion to princesses, wives of officials and the queen. However, there were also concubines and maids who served the king by sleeping with palace officials, including the king himself, nobles and members of the royal family, and were even presented as a reward or gift. In *Sejarah Melayu* as well as other Malay literary works, it is clearly stated that beauty is a requisite for a woman's standing. This is because beauty played an important role in the olden days. A concubine endowed with beauty was able to achieve the

highest position by becoming the Sultan or king's favourite. Beauty was a factor in the achievement of power. In *Sejarah Melayu*, there is a story about Tun Kudu's little imperfection, which caused Sultan Muzafar Syah to divorce her:

The Emphasis on Tun Kudu's facial features mocks her significance in the exchange. She is doubly punished for her beauty and for her lack of it. In the first instance, her pleasing physical appearance seems to be a reasons for the ruler's decision for taking her as a wife. When the king is forced to give her up, her beauty has a noticeable flaw: one of her eyes squinted slightly. By introducing her squint into the narrative, the scribe is implying that Tun Kudu is not actually worthy of the king because she is less than perfect.

(Ruzy Suliza, 2003, p. 130)

This citation is proof that beauty was an important factor for a woman to become a king's companion. Another incident in Singapore in which a concubine named Dang Anum was cruelly punished reinforces the significance of a woman's appeal. Being beautiful, she became the favourite concubine of Raja Iskandar Syah, much to the envy of his other concubinees. Dang Anum eventually became the victim of slander and was ultimately punished by impalement at the corner of the marketplace.

*"Sebermula ada seorang bendahari Raja Iskandar Syah, Sang Rajuna Tapa namanya; asalnya orang Singapura, ada dengan pedayangan Palembang beranak seorang perempuan, terlalu baik rupanya; dipakai oleh Raja Iskandar Syah, terlalu kasih baginda. Maka oleh gundik-gundik yang lain difitnahkan berbuat jahat"*

[Once, Sultan Iskandar Syah's treasurer, Sang Rajuna Tapa, from Singapore had a daughter with a maid from Palembang. She was very beautiful; She became the king's concubine and was much loved by him. For that, the other concubines accused her of infidelity]

(*Sulalatus Salatin*, 2010, p. 69)

Although Dang Anum's beauty caused her to be punished, her death was not in vain. A huge catastrophe befell Singapore when her father sought vengeance by plotting with Majapahit to attack Temasik.

*“Hatta, maka Sang Rajuna Tapa pun berkirim surat ke Majapahit, demikian bunyinya, “ Sang Rajuna Tapa bendahari Raja Singapura empunya sembah kepada Betara Majapahit jikalau Betara hendak mengalahkan Singapura, segeralah datang; hamba ada belot dalam negeri”.*

*“Maka raja dengan segala para menteri hulubalang, sida-sida betara sekalian pun berlepaslah dibawa rakyat ke Seletar, lalu berjalan ke darat mengiringkan baginda. Maka Jawa pun kembalilah dengan kemenangan”*

[Hence, Sang Rajuna Tapa wrote a letter to Majapahit, which goes like this: “Sang Rajuna Tapa treasurer of the King of Singapore would like to inform the Prime Minister of Majapahit that if he wishes to defeat Singapore, come immediately, I will turn traitor for the country”

Therefore, the Sultan and his warriors, and ministers left for Seletar brought by the people, and walked to the land accompanying the king. Java went back victorious.]

*(Sulalatus Salatin, 2010 p. 70)*

This episode reveals the magnitude of the role and power of the concubine. Dang Anum was slandered by the Sultan’s other concubines due to envy. The Sultan, in a fit of jealousy and rage, and without further investigation, meted out a cruel punishment. The consequences of this action were far reaching; the sovereign state of Singapore collapsed and no king has ruled the state since then. The Malay rulers, who were believed to be protected by their sovereignty, instantly lost their kingdom and became refugees to save themselves from their enemies. Hence, the power that shaped the history of the fall of Singapore was caused merely by the impalement of a concubine. Although the conflict was small, the impact was huge and this incident still remains safely embedded in the annals of the Malay race and has become an episode to be remembered.

A concubine’s beauty not only can cause the downfall of a kingdom but also create enmity between brothers, as is recorded in *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*. This work narrates how Sultan Maliku-l Mahmud became enraged when his concubine was taken away by his brother, Sultan Maliku-l Mansur:

*“Semasa kembali, sampai di kota Sultan Maliku’l Mahmud, lalu ternampak oleh Sultan Maliku’l Mansur seorang perempuan keluar dari dalam istana. Perempuan itu sangat cantik rupa parasnya. Sultan Maliku’l Mansur pula berahilah akan perempuan itu lalu baginda menyuruh hulubalang mengambil perempuan itu dan dibawa ke istana baginda. Berita itu sampai ke pengetahuan Sultan Maliku’l Mahmud, mengatakan Sultan Maliku’l Mansur mengambil perempuan yang keluar dari istana itu. Baginda sangat marahkan Sultan Maliku’l Mansur;*

*... “Jikalau demikian baginda kita hantar ke suatu negeri yang jauh dari sini”*

[On his return to the city of Sultan Maliku’l Mahmud, Sultan Maliku-l Mansur saw a woman come out from the palace. The woman was very beautiful. Sultan Maliku-l Mansur desired the woman and asked his guards to take her to his palace. When Sultan Maliku-l Mahmud came to know about it, he was extremely angry with Sultan Maliku-l Mansur.]

[... “If so, we will banish him to a place far from here”]

*(Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai, 1997, pp. 25-26)*

Following this incident, the two brothers quarrelled and Sultan Maliku-l Mansur was captured, imprisoned and dethroned by Sultan Maliku-l Mahmud. Additionally, his prime minister was sentenced to death. The consequence of this incident, therefore, was not only the enmity it created but the loss of innocent lives.

Beauty is a quality that women desire to possess and they would undertake any means of achieving it. One means is to wear a talisman or amulet, which might have an effect on the wearer or those who look upon her (Syarifah Zaleha, 1998, p. 12). The wearing of talismans by court ladies is a fact recorded in *Hikayat Patani*. Dang Merta, a maid in the palace, became a royal concubine because she wore a talisman pinned to her hair bun, which charmed the Yang Dipertuan Johor (the husband of Raja Kuning) into falling in love with her. Physically, she was not as beautiful as perceived by the Yang Dipertuan:

*Adapun sebab dijadikan biduan pun Dang Merta itu oleh suaranya terlebih daripada segala yang lain, rupanya tiada baik, terlalu jahat lagi hitam pertubuhannya dan mukanya lebar penuh dengan parut puru dan tubuhnya terlalu besar. Dan adalah Dang Merta itu berguru hubatan kepada Dang Jela dan Dang Jela itu hamba kepada Bonda Yang Dipertuan. Hatta sehari kepada sehari makin kasih Yang Dipertuan akan Dang Merta itu, lalu diperbuatkan rumah di luar pintu litung perempuan sebelah matahari jatuh itu. Maka Yang Dipertuan pun terlalu sangat kasih akan Dang Merta itu, tiadalah pergi beradu dengan Phra Chau lagi.*

[Dang Merta became a singer because she had a beautiful voice but she did not have good looks, she was dark and her face was broad and full of pockmarks and her body was too large. But Dang Merta had a teacher called Dang Jela who was the servant of Yang Dipertuan's mother. Hence, day by day, Yang Dipertuan became more enchanted with Dang Merta, he built a house for her where the sun set. The Yang dipertuan was so enamoured with Dang Merta, he no longer went to bed with Phra Chau.]

(*Hikayat Patani*, 1992, p. 41)

Dang Merta became increasingly powerful when she began using talismans and amulets, thus subjecting the Yang Dipertuan to her will. According to Lukes (1985, p. 6), in general, the person who wields power has his own resources to make others fall under his influence, regardless of the victim's awareness. This view proves that, according to the narrative, Dang Merta possessed this power because the talisman she pinned to her hair bun was capable of seducing the Yang Dipertuan. Her power was so great that the Yang Dipertuan crowned her as the ruler with the title Encik Puan, though it was short-lived.

*“Jikalau sungguh tuanku kasih akan patik, tuanku tabalkanlah patik, jikalau sehari tuanku tabalkan sehari patik mati pun patik sukalah”. Hatta maka Yang Dipertuan pun berteguh-teguhlah janjinya dengan Dang Merta itu, maka Dang Merta baharulah mahu tidur dengan Yang Dipertuan itu. Maka Dang Merta pun disuruh panggil Encik Puan, tidak diberi panggil nama Dang Merta orang itu dibelah mulutnya”*

[“If Your Highness really loves me, do put me on the throne; even if it is for a day I am crowned, I will die happy.” Hence, the Yang Dipertuan fulfilled his promise to Dang Merta, and Dang Merta agreed to sleep with him. Dang Merta was then given the title Encik Puan, and no one was allowed to call her Dang Merta after that.]

(*Hikayat Patani*, 1992, p. 42)

So great was Dang Merta’s power that the Yang Dipertuan would no longer sleep with Raja Kuning: “Yang Dipertuan was so enamoured with Dang Merta, he no longer sleeps with Phra Chau” (*Hikayat Patani*, 1992, p. 41). In fact, Raja Kuning then withdrew to the garden hall and did not sleep at the palace anymore. The Yang Dipertuan’s infatuation with Dang Merta and fulfilling her demands caused him to neglect the affairs of the state. Thus, the Acheh people had freedom of the palace, which gave rise to dissatisfaction among the palace officials who were natives of Patani. Apart from the conspicuous power of the concubine, there was also power that she wielded discreetly. According to Bacrach and Baratz in *Key Concepts Power* (John Scott, 2001, p. 8), there was also power behind the scenes: “The second face of power, on the other hand, comprises the hidden, behind the scenes processes of agenda setting that termed non decision making”. This means that an individual can play his role discreetly or unintentionally although he does not directly move the event. For instance, Tun Ratna Wati, a royal concubine, succeeded in shaping the government through her descendants.

Tun Ratna Wati’s birth was no different from that of the children of Melaka’s high officials of that time. However, without realising or planning it, she would grow up to shape the Melaka Sultanate dynasty and leave behind a huge impact on the history of Melaka. It was by chance that she shaped the course of events as opportunity presented itself (Ismail Azman, 2009, p. 69). This episode takes place after the death of Sultan Mahmud Syah. Raja Ibrahim was crowned the Sultan of Melaka with the name Sultan Abdul Syahid. Although he was still a child, he was chosen as the heir as his parents were both royals. His brother, Raja Kassim, was older but since his mother was a commoner (a royal concubine), he was denied the throne. Raja Kassim staged a coup d’etat and the new Sultan was killed. Raja Kassim then ascended the throne with the name Sultan Muzaffar Syah.

*“Baginda Mani Purindam beranakkan dua orang lelaki, yang tua bernama Tun Ali, yang perempuan bernama Tun Ratna Wati terlalu*

*baik parasnya. Setelah besar maka diperisteri oleh Sultan Muhammad Syah, beranak seorang lelaki bernama Raja Kassim,*

[Mani Purindam had two sons, the elder was named Tun Ali, the daughter was called Tun Ratna Wati, who was very beautiful. When she grew up, she was married to Sultan Muhammad Syah, they had a son, Raja Kassim]

*(Sulalatus Salatin, 2010, p. 82)*

*“Syahadan maka Raja Kassimlah menggantikan kerajaan adinda baginda. Maka baginda pun ditabalkan oranglah; adapun gelar baginda di atas kerajaan. Sultan Muzaffar Syah”*

[Raja Kassim took over his younger brother’s throne. He was then crowned and ruled by the name of Sultan Muzaffar Syah]

*(Sulalatus Salatin, 2010, p. 82)*

This episode proves that the Melaka Sultanate dynasty, which began with Sultan Muzaffar Syah and ended with the last Sultan, Sultan Mahmud Syah, were all descendants of a royal concubine (Ismail Azman, 2008, pp. 87-93). After the demise of the Queen and her consort (Raja Perempuan and Permaisuri Besar), Tun Ratna Wati was not made a queen because she was not the daughter of a prime minister; thus, she remained a royal concubine only. However, her strategy was successful as she was able to influence the Sultan of Melaka by ensuring that her descendants—that of a royal concubine—inherited the government of Melaka.

Cases of concubinees’ offspring succeeding to the throne not only occurred in Melaka, but also in Johore, an example being Sultan Ala Jalla Abdul Jalil Syah. He had offspring with a concubine, though it is unknown if she was a secondary wife or a royal concubine. The story is as follows:

*“Maka baginda beranak pula dengan gundek baginda tiga orang laki2: sa-orang Raja Husin namanya, dan sa-orang Raja Mahmud nama-nya, dan sa-orang Raja Hasan nama-nya di-rajakan di Siak; dan Raja Husin di-rajakan di Kelantan dan Raja Mahmud itu dirajakan di Kampar”*

[Hence His Highness had three sons with his concubine: One was Raja Husin, another was Raja Mahmud and also Raja Hasan who was made the ruler of Siak; Raja Husin was made the ruler of Kelantan and Raja Mahmud the ruler of Kampar]

(*Sulalatus Salatin*, 2010, p. 310)

This citation attests that the offspring of a concubine had the right to become the Sultan, to govern and to possess privileges equal to heirs born of royal parents. Although they became rulers of small provinces, they were still given the opportunity to rule.

*Sulalatus Salatin* narrates stories of love and romance as well as a sexual encounter. Among the stories the reader would come across is that of Hang Tuah and a maid in the royal palace.

*“Syahadan beberapa lama maka datanglah hujjatu’l balighat akan Hang Tuah; maka ada seorang dayang-dayang raja, orang yang keluar masuk, bukan orang yang tetap di dalam, bermukah dengan Hang Tuah. Maka diketahui oleh Sultan Mansur Syah; baginda pun terlalu murka. Hang Tuah disuruh baginda bunuh kepada Seri Nara diraja”*

[After some time, as can be proven, came the warrior Hang Tuah and there was a royal maid, someone who came and went, not one who resided there, who had a sexual encounter with Hang Tuah. This became known to Sultan Mansur Syah, who became enraged. He commanded Seri Nara diraja to kill Hang Tuah]

(*Sulalatus Salatin*, 2010, p. 130)

In feudal times, the king had complete control of the palace. As such, Hang Tuah’s liaison with the royal maid was an especially treasonous act, even more serious than assassinating a king. Even though Hang Tuah was admired by the Sultan, whom he had served well, he was still sentenced to death. This incident demonstrates the exalted status of a royal concubine, since anyone who touched her was faced with death, as in the case of Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat and Tun Beraim Bapa.

The second episode also involves a relationship with a concubine. The death of Hang Tuah enraged his friend, Hang Jebat, who ran amok and tried to avenge Hang Tuah’s death, which he viewed as a cruel punishment

that was not properly investigated. In retaliation, Hang Jebat abducted the Sultan's favourite concubine to show his resentment. Abducting the Sultan's concubine was an act viler than evicting the Sultan from his palace, attempting to assassinate him or even seizing his power. Assassination and seizure of power were common and frequent occurrences in a feudal society, but seizing the king's woman or concubine was a rare occurrence. It was such a degrading act for the Sultan, especially since he was the ruler of the powerful state of Melaka (Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2008, p. 102).

*“Hatta dalam antara itu Hang Kasturi pun berkehendak seorang dayang-dayang dalam, yang dipakai raja, tetapi hasratnya yang sah Hang Jebat yang empunya pekerjaan”*

[In the meantime, Hang Kasturi slept with a court maid, who belonged to the Sultan, but in fact it was Hang Jebat who did the dastardly act.]

(*Sulalatus Salatin*, 2010, p. 138)

Hang Jebat's treachery was extremely shocking as he carried out not one but two acts of treachery. Firstly, he seized the power of the Sultan and, secondly, he took over the Sultan's concubine. Both of Hang Jebat's actions can be interpreted as symbolic acts of vengeance. However, the seizing of the Sultan's concubine was the greater unforgivable act and the perpetrator must be killed for encroaching on the ruler's personal territory. Tun Beraim Bapa, titled Raja Muda Pasai, was also sentenced to death by his father, Sultan Ahmad Perumadal Prumal, out of jealousy and frustration after being suspected of flirting with his concubine, Tun Fatimah Lepau.

*Tun Fatimah Lepau ialah gundik Sultan Ahmad. Maka Tun Beraim Bapa bertanya, “Hai ibuku Tun Fatimah Lepau, bunga siapa dikarang ibuku itu? Setelah sudah dikarang, maka Tun Fatimah pun lalu berdiri serta ia melompat dan melarikan bunga itu ke dalam istana. Tun Beraim Bapa pun marah lalu diikutnya hendak ditangkapnya bunga itu lalu tertangkap punca kainnya. Maka terdempuk bahu Tun Beraim Bapa tertumus pada pintu istana itu dan Tun Beraim Bapa pun undurlah.*

*Maka Sultan pun terkejut daripada tidurnya. Maka Sultan memanggil Dara Zulaikha “Ayuhai Dara Zulaikha Tingkap, apa mulanya yang bergerak di istana ini gempakah? Ya Tuanku Syah Alam, suatu pun*

*tiada melainkan paduka anakanda Tun Beraim Bapa bersenda gurau denga Tun Fatimah Lepau.*

*“Ini rahsiaku kepadamu jangan engkau katakana kepada seseorang jua pun. Jikalau si Beraim Bapa tiada kubunuh, kerajaanku jangan kekal, bau syurga pun jangan kucium”*

[Tun Fatimah Lepau was Sultan Ahmad's concubine. Tun Beraim Bapa asked her, “Mother, Tun Fatimah Lepau, whose flower are you making?” After completing the flower, Tun Fatimah stood up, jumped and ran away with the flower into the palace. Tun Beraim Bapa became angry and followed her, to take the flower from her, but he managed to grab only the hem of her robe.

Tun Beraim Bapa's shoulder hit the palace door and he then withdrew. The Sultan was startled from his sleep. He called Dara Zulaikha “Dara Zulaikha, what moves in the palace, is there an earthquake? Your Highness Tuanku Syah Alam, it is nothing except your son Tun Beraim Bapa flirting with Tun Fatimah Lepau.

“I am telling you a secret, which you must not reveal to anyone. If I do not kill Beraim Bapa, my kingdom will not last and I will not go to heaven”]

*(Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai, 1997, pp. 42-43)*

This incident in which Tun Beraim Bapa flirted with Sultan Ahmad's concubine made the Sultan even more determined to kill his son because it further fueled a conflict between them, as narrated in the beginning of the story. However, it is unclear if Tun Fatimah Lepau was a secondary wife or a royal concubine as there is no supporting text to confirm that she was legally married to Sultan Ahmad.

Cases of killing over a concubine did not stop at Sultan Mansur Syah's reign. It also happened during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Syah. Sultan Mahmud Syah instructed Tun Isap to kill Tun Ali because Tun Ali visited Tun Dewi in secret long before the Sultan, and thus the Sultan was not able to be with her. Tun Dewi was an ordinary concubine who neither lived in the palace nor was maintained by the Sultan. Due to this incident, Tun Ali was killed out of jealousy. It did not stop there though. Tun Isap was also killed to avenge the death of Tun Ali Sandang. The anger and vengeance of the Sultan over his obsession with a concubine caused the deaths of two men.

There is an episode about Sultan Mahmud “playing” with the wife of Tun Biajid, which caused Tun Biajid to stage a silent protest. Since learning of the incident, Tun Biajid refused to meet the Sultan although he was summoned to the palace many times. This silent protest tormented the Sultan until he eventually acknowledged his mistake. To make amends, the Sultan awarded his concubine, Tun Iram Sendari, to Tun Biajid.

Tun Biajid’s silent protest in fact elevated his status as it was very rare for a Sultan to present his concubine to a subject. It confirmed that the Sultan acknowledged his wrongdoing and thus put aside his ego as a ruler. Hang Tuah, who was most revered by his Sultan, was sentenced to death for sleeping with the Sultan’s concubine. Conversely, Tun Biajid received a huge reward from his Sultan and even went unpunished for his silent protest (Abdul Rahman, 1985, p. 44). Presenting Tun Iram Sendari as a reward was the Sultan’s way of regaining Tun Biajid’s service. Thus, concubines did not only leave a negative impact; they could also leave a positive impact. The power of Tun Iram Sendari here was the ability to pacify two antagonistic parties so that the social contract held by the Malays, which is not to be treacherous to the ruler, is strengthened. This case proves that a concubine could be a positive force.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the events narrated by the authors in these three narratives, it is proven that concubines were able to leave an impact due to the power bestowed upon them by the sultans or rulers, all of which have been clearly recorded in *Hikayat Patani*. The power of a concubine character is rarely narrated in an overt manner, but rather in a subtle and discreet manner, leaving the reader to comprehend and interpret each episode. It was up to the concubine in question whether she used the full extent of her ‘borrowed’ power. On the whole, this study on the power of the concubine character has been based on external and internal aspects in order to give a balanced view of the role of the concubine by analysing selected traditional Malay literary works. Indirectly, this depicts the variety of concubine characters that enlivened the palace environment. As such, this study has proven the important role of the concubine character, either in a positive or negative light.

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