

SYAIR KISAHNYA KHABAR ORANG WOLENTER
BENGGALI: A SRI LANKAN MALAY SYAIR,
INTRODUCTION AND TEXT

B. A. HUSSEINMIYA
University of Peradeniya
Sri Lanka

BACKGROUND

On new year's day, 1819, a serious armed clash broke out in the vicinity of Slave-Island, the military cantonment area in Colombo. It involved two different races of native soldiers serving the British army.¹ On the one side were the Malay soldiers of the 1st Ceylon Regiment, and on the opposing side were the Sepoys of the Benggali (Ceylon) Volunteers of the 2nd Battalion of the 20th Bengal Native Infantry.

The First Ceylon Regiment, consisting of Malay soldiers, was a regular infantry unit which grew out of a long standing Malay Corps under the Dutch rulers (1656—1796).² It was reorganised in 1800 on the initiative of Frederic North, the first British Governor of Ceylon.³ Subsequently three other battalions of native soldiers, namely 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ceylon Regiments were formed which included Sepoys and Kaffirs (of African descent) respectively.⁴ Once the British had succeeded in establishing their control on the whole of Ceylon by annexing the last of the Sinhala Kingdom, in Kandy, in the year 1815,⁵ it was found redundant and even uneconomical to maintain four different battalions of native infantry units, and consequently these were reduced to only the 1st Ceylon Regiment of Malays and the 2nd Ceylon Regiment comprising of Sepoy and Kaffir soldiers.⁶

Within two years of their success in taking over the Kandyan Kingdom, the British faced a serious crisis in holding on to their power as a result of a massive rebellion which broke out in the hill country region of Uva in September 1817.⁷ The available military force at the time, the afore-mentioned two native battalions and the British Regiments of 73rd Highlanders and the 19th Foot were hardly sufficient to quell the Sinhalese uprising, let alone controlling a whole island. When things turned very bad for the British following successful inroads made by the rebels in the hill country, who wiped out the British military outposts at the initial stage of fighting, the then Governor Robert Brownrigg was compelled to seek urgent assistance from the East-Indian Company forces stationed in India, first from the Presidency of Madras and later from the Fort William in Calcutta.

The first batch of foreign troops to arrive from Madras on the 22nd March 1818 were the First Battalion for the 15th Madras Native Infantry and the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Regiment.⁸ By September, further rein-

* Visiting Lecturer in Institute of Malay Language, Literature and Culture, UKM from Nov. 1985 — May 1987.

forcements of troops from Calcutta arrived on the island which consisted of the 2nd Battalion of the 20th Bengal Native Infantry (also known as Bengal-Ceylon Volunteers) and the British 89th Regiment.⁹

The British had ultimately succeeded in routing the rebels by the month of November in 1818. Governor Brownrigg himself could return to Colombo on 25th November 1818, after nearly eighteen months of absence. The other government troops also began to come back to Colombo, including the Sepoy soldiers of the Madras Native Infantry sent to quell the rebellion. As for the Malay soldiers of the 1st Ceylon Regiment, many were still waiting for orders to return home at the year's end, leaving only a company or two of about 200 soldiers remaining in the city of Colombo. All of them were living in the cantonment area of Slave island, (which later emerged as a main residential area for the Malays in Colombo). The area was known to the Malays by the name of *Kampung Kertel*, (the latter word derived from an original Portuguese word *Kartel*, meaning barracks).

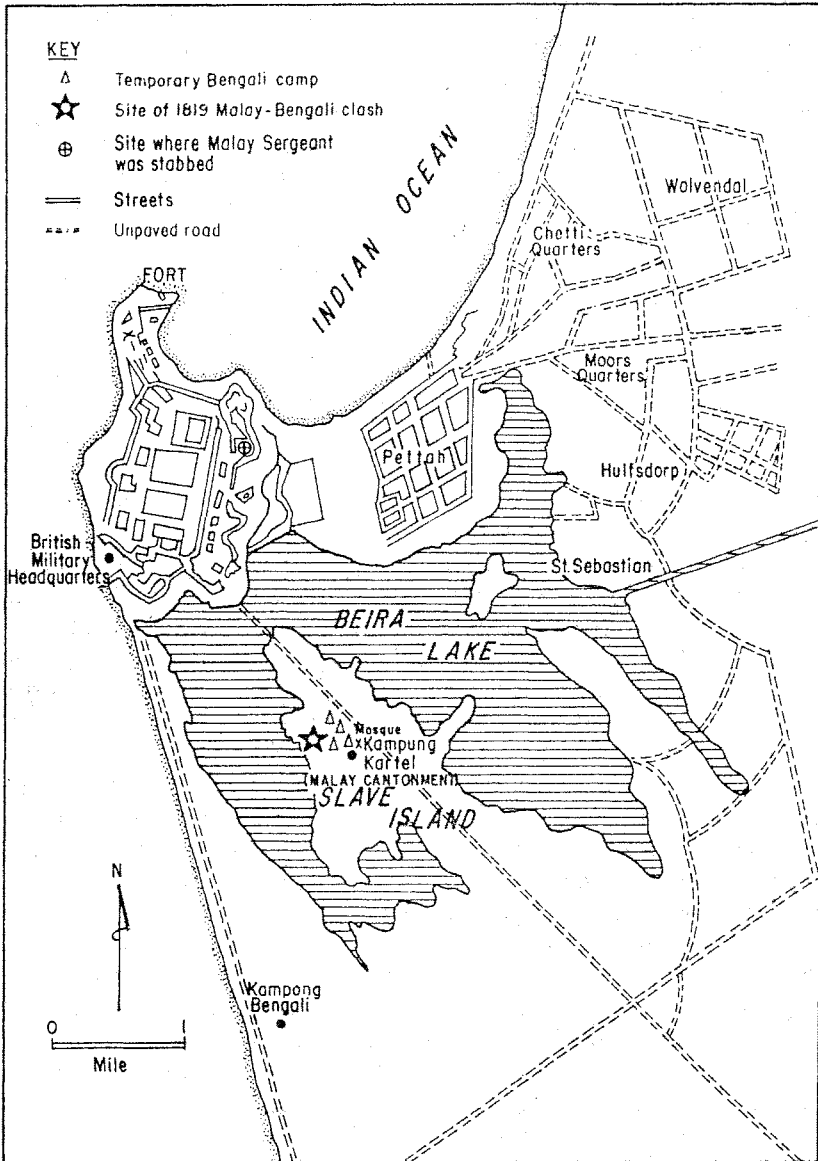
Slave Island alias *Kampung Kertel*, in the early 19th century was a tongue of land surrounded by a lake (now known as Beira lake) on three sides, almost like a Peninsula, joined to the Colombo Fort by a bridge and a causeway.¹⁰ Originally founded as a safe place to house the slaves of the Dutch, the area grew into a military cantonment in the early years of British rule, and became the home of the Malay Regiment (later Ceylon Rifle Regiment) until it was disbanded in 1873. Slave Island had full paraphernalia of a native military establishment, an administrative block, officer's mess, married men's quarters, a bachelor's mess, military school, and a parade ground etc. Not far away from the Malay quarters, but across the Beira lake on the road leading to Galle, (a Southern coastal town), were found the homes of the Sepoys troops, known as Bengali quarters'.¹¹

The Sepoys of the 20th Bengal Native Infantry, arrived on the island at the end of the 1818 rebellion. They were given temporary shelter in *Kampung Kertel* of Slave Island, not far away from the Malay soldiers' residence. Of the five hundred Bengali Sepoys, more than four hundred were placed in their temporary camps in the Slave Island.

The unfortunate incident of the 1st of January 1819 involved the Bengali-Ceylon Volunteers as against the depleted number of Malay soldiers left behind in the Slave Island cantonment. It was in the nature of a street battle that began at about 2 p.m. in the afternoon and went on for several hours fiercely fought by the Malays and the Bengalis. Its horrible consequences were partly averted by timely arrival of some British officers at the scene of fighting. The mini battle in which all sorts of weapons were used including krisses, swords and guns left two Sepoys killed and several soldiers wounded from both sides.

According to the British sources, even before the outbreak of the street battle in the afternoon there appeared to have been some tension in the Slave Island area between the Malays and the soldiers of the 2nd battalion of the 20th Bengal Native Infantry. It started as a result of a trivial incident of a fighting between two boys, one a Malay and the other a Sepoy's son which had irritated the feeling of soldiers of both nationalities'.¹²

MAP OF COLOMBO SITE OF 1819 MALAY-BENGALI CLASH



Source: Adapted from R. L. Brohier (1984).

In the morning on the same day another untoward incident had taken place near the northern end of Colombo Fort, through which a Malay sergeant and his companion were passing to make their purchases in the Colombo grand bazaar. One of the Sepoy guards belonging to the Battalion of Bengal Volunteers is said to have jostled and wounded the Malay sergeant of the 1st Ceylon Regiment with his bayonet.¹³ The latter returned to his cantonment whereby the story of the insult received by the Malay sergeant spread like wild fire among his companions, rousing up their revenge. Although the number of Malay soldiers left behind in the cantonment was smaller than the combined strength of the Bengali Sepoys and sepoy of Madras native Infantry then stationed in Colombo, the Malays could not contain their wrath and staged an attack on the Bengali volunteers.

The Ceylon Government Gazette of 2nd January 1819 which first reported this incident states that the affray took place in the afternoon of the previous day at 2 p.m.

The timing of the fighting is significant, because January 1st in the year 1819 fell on a Friday. It means that the Malay soldiers had been carefully planning for a pouncing attack, or more plausibly, that they decided to put off their fight until the completion of their Friday noon congregational prayers which usually lasted between 12.30 to 1.30 in the afternoon.¹⁴ One might perhaps imagine how the Malay soldiers immediately after the prayers rushed out of their mosque, chanting 'Allahu Akbar' (Allah is great) before they carried out 'lightening strike' upon the Bengali soldiers. The fighting lasted a few hours resulting in casualties on both sides, but losses on the side of the Malays, given the ratio of their low numbers as compared to the Sepoys would have been far higher if it had been not for the timely arrival of the British commissioned officers. The vindictive Malays were able to cause the death of two soldiers, and inflict wounds on others.

The military court began its enquiries immediately on the following day and continued until the 8th of January.¹⁵ Witnesses from both sides were called as well as testimonies from outsiders who were able to furnish evidence about the origins and circumstance of the affray. In the end, no conclusive evidence emerged to indict any particular offenders. The court decreed that due to the contradictory statements of the witnesses, it was almost impractical to determine the nature of fighting or the degree of culpability that could be attached to the individuals involved in the clash. The Commander of the Forces, therefore, finally conceded that "he did not think it any degree useful or advisable to direct any proceeding that have already taken place."¹⁶

What may be construed as seemingly a trivial episode by a modern reader was, but caused some embarrassment to the British authorities at the time.¹⁷ The Governor, Robert Brownrigg, had to send a special despatch to Major General Henry Torrens at Horse Guards in London explaining the background to the incident. It appears that all kinds of rumours were circulating about the Malay-Bengali clash that prompted him to take this precaution, because to quote his own words "I have entered into this detail

to guard against any exaggerated statement that may be propagated propaganda by some of the many persons now going to England."¹⁸

On the other hand, as far as the Malays were concerned, as a party directly involved in the fighting, the incident seemed to have made a deep memorable mark, not only in the minds of contemporary people, but also in the generations to come. Thus, an anonymous Malay writer as late the 19th century still could make some detailed reference to the events preceding the fighting as if it had happened yesterday.¹⁹ As we will see next, the 1819 Malay-Bengali clash also became the theme of a Malay 'rhymed chronicle', written almost immediately after its outbreak.

THE SYAIR

Apart from the information provided by the British sources, on which the above summary is based, there also exists an interesting account of the Bengali-Malay clash of 1819 in the form of a Malay *Syair*, first written in 1820, by a locally-born Malay. It is a first hand, eye-witness account of the actual scene of the fighting, composed as its author claims with the motive of providing a true and accurate description of the incident, because he had been aware of several others in the community and outside who had been spreading exaggerated stories about the clash, the number of deaths, etc.²⁰

The syair has been chosen here to be presented in the form of a romanised edition with notes, not because its theme is of some extraordinary interest to students of Malay literature, or because it provides an interesting or added sidelight to the 1819 clash already well documented in the British sources as described above.

The syair is presented here because it is by far the earliest of the original composition among the indigenous writings that surfaced with the recent discovery of Sri Lankan manuscripts. This is also the first time that an attempt has been made to present a complete sample of a Malay writing from Sri Lanka; earlier our knowledge was confined to only a general description of the type of Malay classical and indigenous literature.

Among the category of 'topical' syairs, i.e. dealing with a description of a contemporary events, written in the other parts of the Malay world, such as 'Sha'er Kampong Gelam Terbakar' composed by Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi in 1847, our syair 'Syair Kisahny Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali' can be considered as among the earliest samples of its kind.²¹ Moreover, it would be of some interest to find out how a Sri Lankan Malay author handled a topical syair and how it compares with other similar works of note.

THE AUTHOR

The syair is the work of one Burhan ibn Lay, (Lai) or (Lye) who claims to be a *Priman*, a Free Malay (i.e. a civilian, one who was not attached to the colonial government service, especially in the Ceylon Malay Regiment to

which many Malays belonged at the time). His father, however, held the rank of Captain in the Regiment. While, the author claims himself to be a *Peranakan Melayu* (in this context a Sri Lankan – born Malay) his ancestors seem to have originated from Malays of Chinese origin (Peranakan China) from the region of Semarang, situated at the north coast of the island of Java.²²

Hambalah bernama Burhan Lay
 anaknya Tuan Kapitan Layu
 daripada peranakan anak Melayu
 duduk mengarang rasanya payu

(verse 56)

Although little information is available on the life and career of our 'poet' Burhan Lay, it is significant to note that interest in Malay literary matters seems to have been running in the veins of some members of the Lye family in successive generations. For example, another Sri Lankan Malay Ms. titled, *Syair Syaikh Fadlun* was copied by one Kapitan Ahmad Sallay Lye in the year 1886, and a decade before a Malay/Arabu Tamil fortnightly newspaper was known to have been edited and published by one Baba Noor Sally Lye.²³

Unfortunately, the only Ms containing the *Syair Kisahnya Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali*, first written in 1820, on which this edition is based, is a copy made sometime in the late 19th century. Knowingly or unknowingly, as will be discussed next, its copyist may have not done full justice to the task of giving us a complete original text of the *syair*.

MANUSCRIPT AND ITS COPYIST

The present text is based upon the only extant manuscript which was kindly donated to me by the late Mr. Ghaise Weerabangsa of Trincomale, Kandy.

The manuscript consists of three parts. The first (manuscript A) in which the text is written measures 18 x 11.5 cm., and has 30 folios (i.e. 60) pages of which only 31 pages are devoted to the text. Page 32 carries the colophon and reads as follows:

Barang siapa yang meminjam didalam sehari dua hari baik membalikkan jangan simpan selama-lamanya. Kerana yang punya terlalu ingin mahu hatinya. Kitab ini yang punya sebenar-benarnya Baba Mas Anum Ibnu tuan Kapitan Husain jua adanya. Kapitan Sawal nama uwahandanya. Kapitan Birabangsa nama kake(k)nya. Kapitan Husain nama ayah-andanya. Mas Anum itu orang yang punya.

On the opposite page of the colophon begins (manuscript B), description of some local herbal medicine in Tamil language but written in the Arabian script. On page 39 is written an Arabic *do'a*, and at the end the name of Mas Abdul Wahab with the date 3-12-(18)99 is mentioned. The remaining pages are left blank, but the last four pages contain some Arabic and *Arabu-Tamil do'a's*. The last part of the manuscript (C) consists of an Arabu-Tamil story entitled *Zainal Mulik Padusya Kisyah*. This section is

written in blue European paper and measures 17 x 10.5 cm. and has 28 pages in all. This last section must have been bound later with the above manuscript A and B.

Returning to our text, text A of the manuscript, each page contains 12 lines, written one line after another of which four lines make a quatrain, i.e. the same as the four lines as edited. There are altogether 91 verses in the text, the last 4 verses added by the copyist to serve as a colophon. Verse 5 and 9 have only 2 lines being half a quatrain (as edited), the assumption is that the copyist must have missed out on the other half of the quatrains while copying (It may be also a case of a six lines verse).

It is written in black ink, and the writing in *Jawi* is clear and legible, though hardly to be described as calligraphic. The text is brimming with dittographies, but the unfortunate aspect of the text is that since no other copy is available for comparison, it is difficult to ascertain if certain questionable examples of *Jawi* spellings in the extant manuscript are the fault of the copyist himself. The deviant spellings may as well be a feature of the original text on which the present manuscript is derived.

The manuscript must have been copied somewhere in the very late part of the 19th century when its copyist, Mas Anum Weerabangsa, was serving as a policeman in the town of Kegalle (about 80 km from Colombo on the way to the hill Capital Kandy). According to a note found in page 59 of a still unclassified manuscript (a long blue ledgerbook which contain among other-texts, *Kitab Sultan Nasiran*, an Arabu-Tamil story) now deposited in the Sri Lankan Department of National Archives,²⁴ Mas Anum Weerabangsa died on 7th November 1906 (20th Ramadan 1322 A.H.), the later being a convenient date as a *termino ad que*.

Mas Anum Weerabangsa, as the colophon in the manuscript states was a son of Kapitan Husain, a Subedar (Captain) of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment, whose father Weerabangsa also had once served in the Regiment in the same capacity.²⁵

The family of Weerabangsas was among the few leading Ceylon Malays who had shown active interest in the fostering of traditional Malay literature in the island. This is demonstrated by a fairly large number of Malay manuscripts found in the possession of the members in their family particularly the above mentioned late Mas Ghaise Weerabangsa.²⁶ He inherited much of this literary treasure from his father, Anum Weerabangsa, our copyist. The latter, also had copied a few other manuscripts including Hikayat Sri Rama. It must be mentioned here that when compared with his contemporaries such as Baba Ounus Saldin,²⁷ and Baba Yusuf Jurangpati,²⁸ Anum Weerabangsa does not rate well as a competent copyist, as is reflected in a multiple of careless errors found in the manuscript copy of our syair.

GENERAL REMARKS

The syair under discussion is a relatively shorter one when compared with similar topical syairs written elsewhere in the Malay-speaking countries.²⁹

All in all it consists of only 91 stanzas (of which two stanzas no. 5 and 9 are not complete, although the copyist of the manuscript wrote down these two verses in a continued form, combining them with the other preceding stanzas).

On the whole, one begins to doubt if the only extant version *Syair Kisahnya Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali* is a faithful reproduction of the text which could have been longer in its original form. It appears that the text available to the copyist was not in order, i.e. some pages of the original text were either displaced or misplaced at the time of the copying which may or may not have been noticed by the copyist. Another possibility is that the copyist while, knowing the inadequacy of the text, worked out his own version to make it read like a complete poem.

There is in any case, some kind of disorder in the schemata of events of the 1819 skirmish as presented in our *syair*. The first 57 stanzas of the text, for example, cover the main sequence of the story. It begins with a reference to the 1818 Kandyan rebellion which shook the British administration of Sir Robert Brownrigg, who quickly despatched contingents of Malay and other troops from Colombo. The rebellion, or 'the war' as the author describes it, goes on for one year claiming many casualties. In the end, however, the British were able to quell it by obtaining reinforcements of troops from India. Just at the end of the war, further contingents of Bengali soldiers arrive at Colombo to fight the Sinhalese rebels, but instead they get locked up in a mini-battle with the Malay soldiers, their own colleagues in the British army. The author then goes on to describe the fierce street-fighting between the Malay soldiers and the Bengali Volunteers. The timely arrival of the British military officials brings the affray to an end saving further casualties. Initial enquiries are made to find the killers of two Bengali soldiers. In the trial at the military Court, the Malays are acquitted for want of proper evidence. The Bengalis are said to have lied throughout the proceedings while the Malays present their side of the story in a convincing way. The author then expresses a great sign of relief and offers his gratitude to the Almighty Allah for saving his people from a major calamity. Finally, he tenders his apologies as customary with other *syair* writers and, in verse 62, gives his personal details as the author of the work. Thus, up to this point, the story presented in the *syair* is sequential and unfolds itself in a logical order.

Beginning from verse 62, the *syair* again returns to a point when a military sergeant arrives at the scene of the fighting in order to compile a report, but finds everything has been in order as no Malay soldiers are missing from their homes. Then follows a few verses in which the author chides the Bengali soldiers for their unbecoming character, and claims that he has attempted to present a true description of events as against many wild and exaggerated accounts going round at the time.

Again in verse 76 and verse 77, the *syair* returns to the scene of events. This time it is told that the British soldiers who arrive at the scene of the fighting ask the Malay troops to remain at home, of whom a roll-call was

taken on the following day. The narration then ends abruptly, followed by details of the place and date of composition.

Tamatlah sudah kukarang sangir
sembilan hari bulan rabi'ul akhir
di negeri Selon terlahir
kisahnya khabar orang Wolenter.

(verse 83)

Seribu dulapan ratus nasrani hijrat
di bandar Kelumbu habis tersurat
daripada hati sangatlah ngerat
duduk mengarang dengan sengsyarat

(verse 84)

In the following two verses the author again offers his customary apologies. As mentioned earlier the last four verses beginning from 88 to 91 seem to have been added by the copyist to serve as it's colophon.

SPELLING, LANGUAGE, AND STYLE

Our manuscript exhibits many divergencies in its method of Jawi spelling when compared with either the system of Munshi Abdullah's edition of *Sejarah Melayu* or the modern spelling practised in Malaysia, (e.g. in the Jawi daily newspaper of *Utusan Melayu*). Also, as is common with other old Malay manuscripts, our manuscript has its share of inconsistencies in spelling. It is not certain at this stage to conclude whether our copyist adheres to a system of spelling adopted commonly by other Sri Lankan Malay copyists.

Furthermore the copyists exhibits some confusion in rendering words of foreign origin: e.g. J-b — l or Jene'al (6c), p-l-n-t-r for Wolenter and so on. Even in the case of Arabic words, especially a word like *d aif*, (a familiar word used often in other Malay syairs), is spelt as l -an-g-p, which suggests that the copyist was merely doing some guess work in places where he was not able to read original spellings perhaps spelt rightly in the original text.

Despite shortcomings, the manuscript has some value, as the only extant copy made of the earliest known locally-produced Malay, reflects to some extent the usage of the literary language as practised in the early part of the 19th century among the Malay community in Sri Lanka.

VOWELS

The copyist had been somewhat parsimonious in the use of vowels, especially with 'alif'—a.

- i.e. k-r-ng for Karang (1c)
- m-n-j-d-y for Menjadi (3a)
- S-r-b for Serba (13b)

and at other instances an extra 'a' is introduced in place of 'e', the initial pepet sound.

paperangan for peperangan (28c)
 sapanjang for sepanjang (29d)
 malihat for melihat (63a)

(Insertion of *alif* in places of pepet in the initial syllables is characteristic of certain dialects especially Minangkabau as shown by Skinner (1963:53) Kathirithamby — Wells and Yusoff Hashim (1985:xiii), and in Banjarese dialect as shown by Ras (1968:9)).

Our manuscript substitutes *alif* for pepet-sound only occasionally, although the conjunction word *dengan* is spelled throughout as *dengan*, a feature common to almost all Malay manuscripts of Sri Lankan origin. It may be noted here that in the recently published *Syair Muko Muko* by Kathirithamby-Wells and Yusof Hashim (1985), its editors have opted to retain the spelling *dangan* in their romanized version, because of its consistency and the Minangkabau dialect's influence in the language and spelling used by its author.

Another notable feature in the use of vowel 'a' is, that when a word has both an open 'a' in the penultimate and in the final syllables, here it is inserted in the final syllable only, which is usually the opposite to the accepted norm of Malay spelling.

i.e. b-h-s-a for bahasa (1b)
 t-n-a- for tana(h) (2b)
 r-y-a for raya (3c)
 b-h-y-a for bahaya (3d)

Insertion of the letter 'y' in some words like 'pegang' as p-y-g-ng, which renders the pepet sound 'e' in the initial syllable as long 'e', and in the final syllable of *boleh* as b-w-l-y — i.e. *boley* (10d) are perhaps indications of the influence of the copyist's spoken dialect.

CONSONANTS

Very often no graphic distinction is made between:

1. Kh for h-
 Khabar is always written as habar.
2. K for g:
 sekenap instead of segenap (12d)
 kempit instead of gempit(a) (29b)
 kerbang instead of gerbang (33c)
3. Sy for sy.
 bahasya (1c) for bahasa
 desya (1d) for desa
 merasya (22c) for merasa
 syayang (22d) for sayang
4. 'ain becomes ng — with three dots placed on top of the letter ain.
 i.e. Sangir for Syair (1c)
 Sangat for sa'at (8d)

This feature is typical of Javanese manuscripts letters that are used to represent Arabic sounds unknown in Javanese sometimes have three dots placed over them (Drewes 1969:5)

i.e. Shin as S, ain as ng, qaf as K. Also letters s, sh, and s are used interchangeably in Javanese.

5. Glottal stops represented by Kat-K is virtually absent in the manuscript.

Thus henda for hendak (37a)
tida for tidak (6b)

6. Another interesting aspect of the influences of Javanese writing is absence of 'h' especially in final syllables.

tana for tanah (2b)
datangla for datanglah (3d)
apala for apalah (17a)
musu for musuh (11c)
jatu for jatuh (32c)

The same is the case in word initial and medial positions, as well.

abis for habis (10a)
jumlahnya for jumlahnya (2a)
perintanya for perintahnya (6c)
rumanya for rumahnya (20b)

but there are also exceptions, an indication perhaps to show that the copyist was aware of the 'h' sound in word initial, medial and final positions.

hari (3c)
hati (8d)
berbilang (23c)
darah (32b)

7. Nasals.

There is some confusion in rendering the nasals of m – and n; frontal nasals (dental and bilabial) tend to become velar nasals.

bohom for bohong (53b)
turutung for turun (14c)
belakan for belakang (41d)

8. d is occasionally spelt with a dot underneath, to represent perhaps a dental d sound (again influenced by Javanese spelling).³⁰

sendiri 4b
kejadi 4c
dan 12c
debu 12c

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

On the whole, as a traditional Malay *syair*, the *Syair Kisahnya Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali* rates reasonably well from the points of view of style and language despite the influence of some localisms. It is written in a clear and straight forward language sufficient to be understood and appreciated by an audience who are adept in listening to or reading classical *syairs*.

The writer exhibits his command of the language, besides being able to communicate in an effective manner his feeling of awe, surprise and fear deriving from his eye witness account of a fierce – street battle in which his people nearly perished as a result of the might of their opponents. Although confined only to few verses, his description of the mini-battle is full of vitality and imagination.

pedang-memedang berlompat-lompat
 tembak menembak terlalu gempit(a)
 ada yang lari terbangkit-bangkit
 sepanjang jalan tida(k) bersempat

(verse 29)

and

ada setenga(h) berlari-larian
 darah mengalir sepanjang jalan
 jatu(h) terlolong reba(h) pingsan
 setenga(h) ingat terkejut-kejutan.

(verse 32)

He even laces his account of the battle with a streak of humour by making a pun at his own status as a civilian Malay who did not want to place himself in a position to exhibit his bravery in a dreadful situation like that.

kerana hamba bukan orang kompeni
 henda(k) berperang menunjuk berani
 sebabnya aku orang primani
 maknanya itu-hendak sembunyi.

(verse 24)

The author thus writes with comparable ease, having at his command a reasonably good vocabulary which he is able to make use in conformity with the accepted traditional form of *syair* which as Skinner (1963: 6) explains; "The *syair* metre, very briefly can be summed up as follows: four 'full' words (as 'minimum free forms', i.e. including bound morphemes) per line and with an end-rhyme of A-A-A-A. "Considering the fact that virtually all narrative verse in Malay is written in the *syair* metre it is left to the authors to show their ingenuity in handling a metre of such simplicity so that they do not bore their audience." In effect several Malay *syairs* falter in this regard, because it is not always possible to adhere to a uniform end rhymes with the limited vocabulary at hand. In practice however, "the Malay *syair* writer is in a position to make light of a requirement that would cause

considerable difficulty in a language in which the phonemic structure of the morphemes was less restricted than it is in Malay." A good syair is characterised by a good techniques in variation in the choice of words particularly in the end – rhymes. Ince Amin's *Syair Perang Mengkasar* (ed. Skinner 1963) and *Syair Ken Tambuhan* (ed. Teeuw 1966) are examples of good Malay syairs.

By comparison, in his bid to keep up the limitations posed by end-rhymes, our writer at times resorts to easy way out by repeating the same words in the end of lines in a same verse.

ada kepada suatu nan hari
waya ham tiga petang hari

(verse 16)

and

apala(h) lagi hendak bicarah
di dalam negeri empunya cederah
sebab Melayu orang angkarah
sedikit terbole(h) menjadi cederah.

(verse 17)

In other instances he uses words ending with somewhat related phonetic sounds, such as laterals r, and l as in Wolenter, and R(a)ifel, (verse 18) and voiceless stops t, and p, as in *terkejut* and *ditutup* (verse 19) which are rendered by different graphemes in (Arabic-Jawi spelling; some modern day editors of syairs, would consider such cases as examples of bad rhyme (Raja Iskandar 1964).

Obviously Syair Kisahnya Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali is not written in the standard Riau-Johore Malay. There are number of examples to show influence of localisms in the poet's language. This is to be anticipated in a person whose ancestors belonged to *Peranakan China* Chinese-born family once domiciled in Semerang, a north-coast city on the island of Java. As in the city of Batavia, where the Malay/Indonesian language grew out of a 'trade-language' or bazaar-Malay, the Malay spoken in cities like Semarang had its own characteristics. One such characteristic typical of bazaar-Malay is the use of simple verbal roots in preference to affixial forms of the verb.

This we see in several places in the syair. For eg. in verse 7 the last line has *bantu* as a verbal noun which in the normal practice would have a suffix particle – an. i.e. *bantuan*. This is also the case with the word *bisa* in verse 34. In verse 48, the verb *dapat* is without any affixation. Perhaps an interesting example of colloquial Malay can be seen in strings of verbal roots such as *berlari datang* (41a), *di suruh cari* (47d), and *Ku pandang-pandang* (25b) etc.

It must be admitted, however, that such deviant linguistic expressions are relatively minimal as compared with certain other syairs written subsequently in Sri Lanka, and particular reference can be made to *Syair Shaikh Fadlun*. One of its copies made in 1886 by Ahmad Sallay Lye, probably a

descendant of our author, has quite a higher quota of 'localisms', than what we come across in our *syair*, possibly because the former was written down somewhat in a later period when the standard of literary Malay in Sri Lanka was declining fast.

By comparison, *Syair Kisahnya Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali* can be considered as one of the reasonably well-written Sri Lankan *syairs*, though not equal to any other *syairs* written in Riau-Johore language and tradition.

SYNOPSIS OF THE SYAIR

Stanza No.

1. Introducing the *syair*.
2. Listen to the tale of the scandal about the (Bengali) Volunteers.
3. Uproar in Colombo over the news (of the outbreak of rebellion in the hill country).
4. General (Robert) Brownrigg is taken by surprise.
- 5-6. The Malay (soldiers) receive orders to march to Kandy; hardly anyone left behind in Colombo.
7. The fighting rages on, and the English authorities receive quick reinforcements.
8. The war goes on for almost a year, with growing casualties.
9. The war ends and the soldiers return from the hill country.
10. As the war ends, the (Bengali) Volunteers (from abroad) arrive at the Island.
11. Soldiers from Bengal brought to fight the (Sinhalese) rebels, instead they quarrel with Malays.
12. Five hundred Bengali soldiers in Colombo.
13. They are divided into four. They are asked not to move until further orders.
14. First Ceylon Volunteers return from Kandy and take up their residence in Kertel in close proximity, to quarters of 'Ceylon Rifle' soldiers.
15. As the Malay soldiers return to their residences, a disaster was to strike them.
16. On the first day of the month of January, at 3 in the afternoon, a calamity strikes the town (of Colombo).
17. Since the Malays are an arrogant people, even a slightest provocation can cause a confrontation.
18. Volunteers and Rifle company men clash with each other.
- 19-22. Commotion and uproar break out. Abuses are hurled at each other, and guns are fired. The frightened onlookers lock up their doors, and others run for cover.
23. Author admits that any person like himself would certainly vanish

- from the scene of fighting when faced with so many swords and weapons.
24. Author says that since he does not belong to the Regiment, and because he is a civilian, he chose to hide himself away from the scene of fighting.
- 25-27. The author expresses his fear and as the fighting worsens. "Better to stay at home than running down the street."
- 29-33. Description of the fighting.
34. The Volunteers who came to show their might ultimately gets routed.
35. There is a Bengali Quarters across the Kampung Kertel towards the (southern) city of Galle.
36. The Bengali Regiment soldiers in the Kampung Bengali hear about the Malay fighters.
37. The Bengali Regiment arrives to attack the Malay soldiers.
- 38-40. A further description of the new outbreak of fighting.
41. I saw a deep wound on the back of a fallen sepoy.
- 43-44. The English (authorities) arrive at the scene of the fighting and they quickly separate the parties.
45. The Malays are told to hide their weapons.
46. As the fighting reaches its end, the soldiers are lined up for inspection.
47. On an order given by General Brownrigg, Bengali Volunteers come to look for the killers.
48. General Brownrigg did not know how to punish the offenders.
49. After a thorough search, they could arrest only two or three persons.
50. The offenders are brought before Military court.
- 51-52. The Malays present their side of the story in a humble manner.
53. Bengali Volunteers were not telling the truth and falter in the witness box.
- 54-55. Through the will of the Almighty God and the blessings of the Prophet Muhammad, Malays are acquitted in the trial and saved from a great disaster.
- 56-62. Author's apologies, "I am locally born Malay and 'My name is Borhan Lay, son of Captain Lay."
63. (English) Sergeant arrives at the scene of the fighting and finds that the Malay soldiers stay in their places.
- 64-69. Although the Malay soldiers were weak, the strong (contingent of) Bengali Volunteers could not overpower them, because the latter were not a god-fearing people.
- 70-71. The author expresses a sigh of relief and thanks the God for saving the Malays from the disaster.
73. "I have not told everything in this syair as others do about the exaggerated number of deaths (on the side of the Volunteers) and so on."

74. Peopld exaggerate the number of deaths etc.
75. "If I choose to follow them, my syair would also become a pack of lies."
76. "I have refrained from relating the incidents which I did not see myself."
- 77-78. The English company arrives at the end of fighting and ask soldiers to line up.
79. Only then the Malays start to ponder over their action.
- 80-81. Both the Malays and the Volunteers are asked to go home and required to assemble on the following day for enquiries.
82. "Not that the Malays only can fight, but through God's help, they were saved from a great calamity".
83. "I complete my syair on the 19th day of Rabiul akhir; I was born in Ceylon, and my syair is kisa(h)nnya Khabar Orang Wolenter (Bengali)."
84. The Syair was written in 1820 in the town of Colombo.
86. Author's apologies.
- 87-91. Owner/copyist notes.

METHOD OF TRANSLITERATION

This transliteration of Syair Kisahnya Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali is based upon the principle adopted by Teungku Iskandar (1970). It has been found unnecessary to adhere exactly to the many idiosyncracies in the original *Jawi* spelling of the manuscript. For example, it has a very high quota of 'sy' spelt instead 's', and furthermore, as mentioned before, the copyist is not consistent in his spelling—a feature common to many old Malay manuscripts. Therefore, the romanised transliteration has been standardised here (some glaring examples of deviant spellings are mentioned in the note on spelling and language).

Words of Arabic origin used in the Malay/Indonesian lexicon are spelt in accordance with the spelling rules as found in Poerwadarminta's *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia* (1976). Arabic words and phrases are spelt according to the system employed in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, but without the use of dots, the *hamza*, and vocalization.

Brackets indicate material inserted by the editor. Missing words and lines are represented by

SYAIR KISAHNYA KHABAR ORANG WOLENTER BENGGALI

1. Bismillah itu puji yang esa
dengan nama Allah tuhan senantiasa
dikarang sangir dengan bahasa
khabar yang ajaib di desa
2. dengarkan tuan suatu al-kisah
di tana(h) Selong empunya temasya

adapun Wolenter orang yang kesya?
membuat fitnah dengan termasya

- 3. di negeri Kelumbu menjadi haruhara
sekalian orang menanggung sengsara
ada kepada suatu hari raya
datangla(h) ba(h)aya dengan sengsara
- 4. adapun musimnya Jeneral B-m-b-r-y
terkejutla(h) oleh baginda sendiri
suatu lagi yang terjadi
tatkala berperang di negeri Kandi
- 5. sekalian Melayu habis menguji
seo(r)ang pun tida(k) bertinggal lagi
.....
.....
- 6. sekalian itu seisi menuju
seorangpun tida(k) di negeri Kelumbu
perinta(h)nya Jene(ra)l menuju maju
mereka itu mashghul di dalam kalbu
- 7. perangnya ramai terlalu huruhara
sekalian mereka itu tida(k) terkira
sebab Inggeris banyak sentera
datangla(h) bantu dengan segera
- 8. perangnya ramai sahaja yang pasti
sangat? Setahun tida(k) berhenti
senantiasa mendengar khabar yang mati
demikian bergendang di dalam hati
- 9. setela(h) (h)abis perang berhenti
datang balek bersangka hati
.....
.....
- 10. tatkala (h)abis sekalian perang
datang menganti seisi orang
sekalian Wolenter terlalu garang
jalannya tida(k) bole(h) dibilang
- 11. datangnye itu dari negeri Bengela
maksudnya memerang musu(h) Cingela
itulah banyak menjadi nyala
dengan Melayu ia membalah

12. jumla(h)nya sekalian lima ribu
henda(k) berdatang di negeri Kelumbu
sesaknya negeri angin dan debu
segenap tempat dapur dan abu
13. sekaliannya itu dibagi empat
seribu orang pada suatu tempat
perintah(h) jangan hendak berberangkat
jikalau mendapat khabar bole(h) berangkat
14. adapun namanya Pas Selon Wolenter
diberinya tempat di Kampung Kertel
maka diturung dari negeri Kandi Selon R(a)ifel
itu pun menghampir di tempat Kertel.
15. beberapa hari antara lamanya
duduk Melayu pada tempatnya
datang musim dengan kutikannya
menjadi bencana dengan sendirinya
16. ada kepada suatu nen hari
waya jam tiga petang hari
kepada tahun bulan Januari
datangla(h) bencana di dalam negeri
17. apala(h) lagi hendak bicarah
di dalam negeri empunya cederah
sebab Melayu orang angkarah
sedikit terbole(h) menjadi cederah
18. adapun Pas Selon Wolenter
henda(k) berperang dengan Kampeni R(a)ifel
perangnya itu maka diambil
dibongkar sekalian pagar kayu diambil
19. dengan Melayu terlalu berkalut
sepanjang jalan dimaki bencut?
sekalian mereka itu tela(h) terkejut
pintu ruma(h)nya sekalian ditutup
20. sekalian mereka itu semuanya terkejut
pintu ruma(h)nya (h)abis tertutup
setenga(h) berkata ter m--y-a-c-w-t
sambil berjalan sekalian dikincit

21. datangnya itu terlalu luput
ku pandangla(h) hamba terlalu takut
berlompat-lompat dimaki bencut?
hati di dalam terkejut-kejut.
22. lakunya itu terlalu garang
sepanjang jalan dibedili orang
sedikit pun tida(k) merasa sayang
siapa bertemu melar(i) pulang
23. pedang dan p-ng tida(k) terbilang
Ilahi nen bukan kepalang
jikalau laksana hamba seorang
kulenyap diberi henda(k) berhilang
24. kerana hamba bukan orang Kampeni
henda(k) berperang menunjuk berani
sebabnya aku orang primani
makanya itu hendak sembunyi
25. bagaimana hatiku tida(k) takut
ku pandang-pandang sangat terkejut
berlari hamba pada suatu pucok
itupun ditengo(k) makiannya bencut?
26. bagaimana hatiku tiada(k) takutkan
sambil berjalan dipalu-palukan
laku(a)nya seperti diharu saitan
sekalian kedai dirombak-rombakkan
27. sebab inila(h) sangat ngeri
bukannya patut melawankan diri
baikla(h) duduk di ruma(h) sendiri
mengapa bersama menurut lari
28. sampaila(h) suda(h) sekalian itu
tempat peperangan di pagar batu
adapun Melayu orang yang tentu
tempat mengamuk seperti hantu
29. pedang-memedang berlompat-lompat
tembak-menembak terlalu gempit(a)
ada yang lari terbangkit-bangkit
sepanjang jalan tida(k) bersempat

30. ada yang memalu dengan batu
jikalau kena nescayalah jatu(h)
tida(k) memandang sala(h) suatu
siapa bertemu segera membantu
31. adala(h) setenga(h) memecah hulu
rasanya sangat terlalu malu
ada sedikit orang yang malu
tempat melawan sambil berpalu
32. ada setenga(h) berlari-larian
darah menga(l)ir sepanjang jalan
jatu(h) terlolong reba(h) pingsan
setenga(h) ingat terkejut-kejutkan
33. setenga(h) lari-berlari pulang
kanan dan kiri tida(k) memandang
jalannya itu tergerbang-gerbang
lalai dan rindu bukan kepalang
34. tersebutla(h) perkataannya suatu al-kisah
daripada orang empunya kesya
datangla(h) ia menunjuk bisa
akhirnya sekalian menjadi binasa
35. ada sebuah kempung Benggali
jalannya penuju di negeri Gali
seberang Kertel tempatnya sali
ruma(h)nya lagi di pinggir Gali
36. ada sesuatu Rejimen Sy-m pe-t-l-n
di kampung Benggali duduk berhimpun
didengarnya Melayu Pas Selon
terlalu sangat hendak melawan
37. bangkitla(h) sekalian henda(k) mendatang
sebagai rimau memandang orang
sedikitpun tida(k) meniru pandang
tempat berm(eng)amuk tempat berperang
38. ramaila(h) mengamuk tikam-menikam
rasanya retak bagaikan alam
laksana siang menjadi malam
mati banyak di tenga(h) kolam

39. perangnya ramai bukan kepalang
mati dan luka tida(k) terbilang
ada yang reba(h) di tengah padang
ditentengla(h) orang dibawa pulang
40. ada setengah berlari-larian
darah mengalir sepanjang jalan
sambil memegang b-k- di tangan
ditentang orang kiri dan kanan
41. ada suatu Sipai berlari datang
sebela(h) tangan pedang dipegang
setengah jalan jatu(h) telentang
ku pandang lukanya terus kebelakan(g)
42. ada yang menikam berlompat-lompatan
bedil dan senapang berkilat-kilatan
dipalunya tambur berhentikan
itupun tida(k) jua didengarkan
43. kerana Inggeris orang yang esa
memerintah orang terlalu bisa
dilihatnya Wolenter (h)abis binasa
segerala(h) hendak dibawa pisa(h)
44. beberapa tuan-tuan yang indah-indah
di negeri Kelumbu hadir berada
sekaliannya datang bertunggang kuda
itupun Melayu ber(h)entinya tida(k)
45. katanya tuan-tuan apakah nisanya?
baikla(h) berhati teman-teman kitanya
jikalau ada yang empunya senjatanya
jangan terpandang dengan matanya
46. setela(h) (h)abis sekalian perang
dihimpunkan masing-masing empunya orang
segera di pagar sekalian orang
me(ng)ambil tipu salba sekarang?
47. datangla(h) Wolenter orang Benggali
siapa yang membunu(h) henda(k) dicari
karena perintah(h) raja Jene(ra)l B-m-b-r-y
siapa yang membunu(h) disuru(h) cari

48. jikalau dapat bawa kemari
apa hukuman aku nen beri
dari kanan sampai ke kiri
tida(k) bole(h) ia mahu dipikiri
49. dicari itu berulang-ulang
seorang pun tida(k) hendak dikenang
fikirnya khabar tida(k) yang membilang
dipegangnya lalu dua tiga orang
50. dibawanya kepada tempat pengaduan
dudu(k) berhukum segala tuan-tuan
ditanyakan khabar sekalian demikian
apakah kamu mulanya sekalian
51. berkata(h) Melayu sambil bertitah
senda menye(m)bah dibawa tahta
ku minta ampun barang dikata
tida(k)lah patek melawan perinta(h)
52. diceritakan segala hal ehwalnya
daripada permulaan datang kesudahannya
didengar tuan-tuan sangat rasanya
terlalu kasihan pada hatinya
53. adapun Wolenter sekaliannya
menjadi bohong sekalian khabarnya
sebab tida(k) dengan sunggu(h)nya
tida(k) bertentu segala katanya
54. adapun Melayu orang yang hina
menanglah segala kata semena
berkat mu'jizat tuhan yang ghana
dijau(h)kan oleh sekalian bencana
55. ditolongnya tuhan seru(a) sekalian alam
sekalian Melayu orang Islam
daripada berkat nabi akhir alam
ditana(h) Selong empunya dalam
56. bukannya hamba menunjuk bisa
mengarang orang empunya kisa(h)
kukrang menduduk senantiasa
akan penghibur hati yang susa

57. hambala(h) bernama Borhan Lay
anaknya tuan Kapitan Layu
daripada peranakan anak Melayu
dudu(k) mengarang rasanya payu
58. karena hamba anak piatu
budi bicara kurangla(h) mutu
senantiasa duduk seperti hantu
tempatpun tiada lagi yang tentu
59. Inila(h) tanda saya yang kurang?
badan da'if di negeri orang
sesalnya hari rasaku walang
tida(k) seakuan? zaman sekarang
60. janganla(h) tuhan di'aibkan hamba
jikalau kurang baik ditambah
karangan sangat teraba-raba
kerana hati sangatla(h) g(h)ulabah
61. bukannya hamba apa susa(h)kan
badan piatu indah pikirkan
kepada sispa lagi dikatakan
suda(h)lah nestapa mahu diapakan?
62. tamatla(h) perkataan segala ehwal
karangan hamba orang yang bebal
di kereka hamba rasanya sebal
pencarian miskin dagang terjual
63. datangla(h) Syerjen melihat bilangan
seorang Melayu pun tida(k) yang kurang
sekaliannya itu dengan ke(le)ngkapan
berhenti berdiri dengan aturan
64. adapun Wolenter orang utama
meng(h)ilang budi terwastu? nama?
sunggu(h) perbuatannya menjadi terima
dengan Melayu tida(k) bersama
65. sunggu(h)pun Melayu orang kecil
berbuatannya tida(k) lagi dimungkir
sunggu(h) tinggi orang (Wo)lenter
sediki(t)pun tida(k) menaru(h) pikir

66. apatah gunanya serba besar
maksu(d) kurang menaru(h) akal
pikirannya itu terlalu gusar
akalnya pendek kemudian men(y)esal
67. lakuannya seperti mempadam dunia
tidak dipikir Tuhan yan g mulia
kurunia tida(k) sebagai dia
makanya berani berbuat gaya
68. apata(h) gunanya serba besar
maksudnya kurang menurut akal
serupa syaitan tida(k) menyambar
makanya lenyap tida(k) berkekal
69. lakuannya seperti mempadam dunia
tida(k) pikir Tuhan yang siya
kuruniya tida(k) sebagai dia
makanya berani berbuat gaya
70. adapun Melayu orang tersiya?
dibawakan oleh segala merbahaya
berkat Muhammad pe(ng)hulu yang sedia
dipiarakan segala hamba dan sa(ha)ya?
71. kita ini hambanya Allah
barang sesuatu dijauhkan balah
jikalau hendak tida(k) bersalah
sejalannya tida(k) menjadi celah
72. ba(i)klah hendak kita berta'lim
kepada tuhan rabbul a'zim
memuji segala orang mu'min
yang memerinta(h)kan segala Muslim
73. tatkala lagi hendak berperang
matinya Wolenter tida(k) terbilang
banyakla(h) khabar menyatakan orang
di dalam sangir tida(k) kukarang
74. jikalau sepuluh ada yang mati
mengatakan orang berketi-keti
bagaimana ku bole(h) mengambil di hati
perkataan orang tida(k) pasti

75. jikalau ku krang khabar begitu
nescaya berbohong syairku itu
ku karang khabar supaya tentu
jangan bersala(h) khabar suatu
76. sebab hamba tida(k) terpandang
makanya itu tida(k) ku krang
jikalau bohong kataku te(r)bilang
tida(k)la(h) menerima kepada orang
77. tatkala perang sekalian (h)abis
datangla(h) berkawal Kampeni Inggeris
sekalian jalan berhimpun berbaris
tinggallah Melayu bagi diiris
78. tida(k)la(h) bole(h) ke sana ke mari
sekalian jalan berkawal dan Santeri
tinggallah baharu di ruma(h) sendiri
menyesal terpugar sehari-hari
79. baharula(h) merasa berbuat pekerti
menyesal sunggu(h) di dalam hati
sedikit bole(h) di dalam hati
sedikit bole(h) peramat-amati
segerala(h) Melayu membela hati?
80. tatkala suda(h) keesokan hari
sekalian Melayu disuru(h) berdiri
memanggil nama perinta(h) dari
serta membilang suru pe(r)gi
81. sekaliannya disuru(h) pulang ke ruma(h)
perkataannya baik menunju(k) terima
adapun Wolenter orang bernama
sedikitpun Melayu tida(k) umpama
82. bukannya Melayu sahaja yang bisa
henda(k) berperang dengan perkosa
dikurnia tuhan esa
supaya tida(k) menjadi binasa
83. tamatla(h) kukarang sangir
sembilan hari bulan rabi'ul akhir
di negeri Selon yang terlahir
kisa(h)nya khabar orang Wolenter

84. seribu dua lapan ratus 20 nasrani hijrat
di bandar Kelumbu habis tersurat
daripada hati sangatlah ngerat
duduk mengarang dengan sengsyarat
85. banyakla(h) khabar ku tida(k) karang
kehendak hati rasa tersenang
duduk mengarang rasaku (w)alang
sakitnya sangat di dalam tulang
86. janganla(h) tuan gusar berbahana
sebab karangan tida(k) berguna
daripada hamba orang yang hina
makanya sangir tida(k) sempurna
87. dengarkanla(h) sekalian sudarah
jangala(h) tuan henda(k) bermalah
bukannya sangir tedapat setara
ku karang dengan gunda sengsarah
88. menurunkan sangir ini
daripada duduk di sini
dengan merindu hati ini
meminta ampun pada tuhan ini
89. Ilahi tuhan rabbil 'alamin
pinta diampun pada segala muslimin
supaya di'ayatkan bertamba(h) angin
daripada tuhan rabbal 'asrul 'azim
90. tamat syair ini pada hari selasa
daripada menurunkan kurang bisa
dengan hati yang sentosa
hendak membaca senantiasa
91. yang punya ini anak tuan Kapitan Husain
di susun Kegalai (s)eteson
di tempatnya polis istasin
henda(k) membaca jikalau perizin.

COMMENTARY

- 1c. The original Javanese term for syair is *singir* (Teeuw 1966; 434). Three dots have been placed on the Arabic letter ain, rendering it to sound as ng. — a practice common to Javanese manuscripts, and it reads s-a-ng-r (*sangir*).
- 2b. Selong or Selon, the name by which the island of Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) was famous in Malay literature. (In Indonesian language 'diselongkan' also has a special meaning of 'to be exiled', indicating perhaps the frequency with which the Dutch banished the Indonesians to Ceylon during their rule in 17th and 18th centuries.
- 2c. The copyist seems to distinguish clearly the word *Kisah*; spelt q-sy-a, i.e. K-sy-a (story) in line 2a from K-a-s-ya (in line 2c). If the latter is the case, Wilkinson's dictionary gives the meanings *kesah* as restless (W. Sumatran dialect) or if in Javanese as *gesah* or *Kasa*, meaning different. The first meaning seems more suitable in the context.
- 3a. Local Malays still pronounce Kelumbu or klumbu to refer to the city of Colombo.
- 4a. Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Brownrigg, British Governor of Ceylon from 1812-1820. A person of Anglo-Irish origin, he was lucky enough to catch the eye of the Duke of York during the disastrous campaign of 1794 in the Netherlands, and he became the Duke's military secretary the following year. In 1803 he exchanged that appointment for Quarter Master-General at the Horse Guards, a position analogous then to Chief-of-Staff. He arrived in Sri Lanka on 11th March 1812, and within three years by annexing the Kandyan kingdom, he completed the conquest of the whole island for the British.
- 4d. Kandi, i.e. the hill — capital Kandy.
- 4d. Perang in this instance refers to the famous Uva or Kandyan rebellion which broke out in the month of September 1817 and was suppressed by the end of the following year. A modern English author, Geoffrey Powell (1973) refers to this as the third war, (the first war between the British and Kandyan in 1803, and the second one in 1815).
- 7c. English — sentry, i.e. soldier-gurads.
- 7d. Refers to various reinforcements received by the British in Ceylon from the Presidencies of India and Calcutta in India, i.e. the arrival of the 1st Battalion of the 15th Madras Native Infantry on 20th March 1818, and 3 weeks later the 2nd Battalion of the 73rd Regiment, to combat the rebels in the Kandyan hills.
- 8b. The Kandyan rebellion of 1817/1818 nearly took one year to be quelled. For these events see Powell, (1973).
- 11a. Refers to 2nd Battalion of the Bengal Native Infantry alias Ceylon-Bengali Volunteers which arrived on the island when the suppression

- of the rebellion was nearly over in November 1818.
- 11b. Local Malay rendering of the words *Sinhalese*, the majority population group in Sri Lanka.
- 13a. Refers to the company formation in the British Army. Each company consisted of one hundred soldiers.
- 14a. A detachment of the 2nd Battalion also known as Bengali-Ceylon Volunteers in the official literature.
- 14b. Kertel, (Portugese Kartel = Barracks) was the name used by the Malays to refer to the area of Slave-Island in Colombo, which became a main Cantonment under the British rule, housing the headquarters of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment, and its auxillary establishments.
- 14c. At this stage only the Malay soldiers of the 1st Ceylon/Regiment were equipped with the Rifles. *Sepoys* in the same Regiment received Rifles in 1842, followed by *Kaffirs* in 1848.
- 15c. K-w-t-y-k-nya: Inserting a 'waw' here is an example of an old form of Malay spelling.
- 16b. Waya is derived from Javanese for time/period – used frequently in Batavian/(Jakartan) Malay dialect, (Chaer, 1976) and also by many Sri Lankan Malay writers.
- 16b. It must be noted here that English sources, i.e. G.O. of 2nd January 1819 states that the fighting broke out at 2 p.m. in the afternoon.
- 19b. Javanese word for bullying? The word *bencut* may be still in use as a form of swearing in the community.
- 24c. *Primani*, is actually the Malay ('i' – added for rhyme's sake) rendering *Priman*, which stands for Freeman; (civilian) one who is not attached to the Government service. In Sri Lanka, this word was specifically used by the Malays to refer to those who were not serving in the army.
- 26d. According to the British sources, the attack took place near the market place in the Slave-Island cantonment. *Kedai* here refers to the shop-houses in the Slave-Island Bazaar.
- 35b. Kampung Bengali was situated at the southern-corner of Slave Island, and was on the way to Galle, an important Southern Coastal town. Here were housed the regular Sepoys or Bengali soldiers (as they were known in the common parlance).
36. Battalion; at this time, the military units of the Regular sepoy of the 2nd Ceylon Regiment were camped in Kampung Bengali. The first part of the word 'sy-a-m' may be a corruption of camp in English?
- 41a. *Salba*, could be from Portugese Salvare – to save. Even now this word is used by the local Malays with the meaning, to escape.
50. Military court proceedings stated immediately on the following day of the outbreak of the Malay-Bengali skirmish and went on until 8th of January 1819.
- 63a. Sergeant, a rank in the military.

65. *Kecil*, or small here must be meant by the author in relation to the smaller numerical strength of the Malay soldiers in town, when compared with the added number of Bengali Sepoys camped at the time in Colombo as part of reinforcements of the British native military force.
- 66-69. The repetition of the 2 lines in these four verses reminds one of the *Pantun berkait*, technique used by some syair writers of the old order.
- 88-91. Verses added by the owner/copyist.

APPENDIX 1

GENERAL ORDERS COLOMBO, 15TH JANUARY 1819

The Commander of Forces publishes for the information of the Army, the opinion of the Court of Enquiry of which Brigadier Shuldham was President, assembled to investigate the causes of an unfortunate Affray which took place between the soldiers of His Majesty's 1st Ceylon Regiment, cantoned on Slave Island, and the Division of the Honble Company's 2nd Battalion of the 20th Bengal Sepoys, quartered near to that Cantonment — and the Lieut. General desires to express His thanks to the Brigadier and the Court for their patient and attentive investigation of the subject referred to them — which commenced on the 2nd and continued by adjournments to the 8th Instant.

Opinion

“The Court having given a patient hearing to such witnesses as have been brought forward from the respective Corps, in addition to those summoned by themselves, whose testimony might lead to elucidate the origin and circumstances of the Affray and enable them to carry into effect the instructions of His Excellency the Commander of the Forces, as communicated in the Deputy Adjutant General's letter, are of opinion as to the primary cause, that it originated in a quarrel in the vicinity of the North Esplanade, between some sergeants of His Majesty's. 1st Ceylon Regiment, and one or more Privates of the Honble Company's 3rd Ceylon Volunteer Battalion — the precise nature of which, or the degree of culpability attaching to the individuals concerned in that affray, it is almost impracticable to determine, from the contradictory statements of those who were present: although they are of opinion that the Malay sergeants were aggrieved on this occasion. But it is sufficiently obvious to the Court that the irritation, excited by the circumstance very soon extended to Slave Island, previous to the arrival of the Malay serjeants, and produced the affray which ensued:

where in it does appear to the Court that the Malays were the aggressors in the assault committed in the Bazar on the Sepoys of the 20th Bengal Native Infantry."

"The consequences of this affray have been the death of two Sepoys, the number of men wounded in the two Corps, and the nature of the wounds, are denoted by the return of the medical officers in charge, which are annexed to the Proceedings".

"The Court conceive it a duly incumbent on them to express their opinions that every exertion was made by Lieut. Colonel Moffatt, Lieut. Colonel Weston, and the Officers of the different Regiments, to allay the irritation the appearance of their Officers, a commendable spirit of discipline and subordination was speedily manifested by the return of both Parties to order, and that the unguarded assertion to the contrary, which proceeded from Lieut. Crooke, inspecting H. M. 1st Ceylon Regiment, is not borne out by any concurring testimony."

"At the same time the Court are willing to admit that Lieut. Crooke may have been led into this error at the period of the alarm of fire having been given in the Malay lines, as stated in Captain De Bussche's evidence."

"With reference to the accusations contained against Lieut. Crooke in the course of yesterday's examination, the Court in justice to that Officer, observe that the charge has been positively denied by him by the embarkation of Lieut. Crooke and the evidences whom he had intended to have adduced in contradiction to that statement, has prevented his appearing before the Court for that purpose".

The Commander of the Forces in notifying to the Army under His Command the foregoing, as the result of the investigation of the Court into the causes and origin of the tumult alluded to, has to express his deep concern that an occurrence so directly contrary to military discipline, and so fatal in its consequences, would have taken place between the two Corps, who had prior to this extent lived in that harmony, which ought always to mark the conduct of troops belonging to the same power however differently composed.

To that previous harmony however, and the general habits of good order, and to the strict attention of the Officers of both services, the Lieutenant General confidently trusts, to prevent any future altercations or misunderstanding between the auxiliary Troops of the Hon'ble the East India Company, and the native Corps of this Establishment.

Where so much confusion had prevailed, and where the provocations which led to the affray are so difficult to be traced to their origin. The Commander of the Forces does not think it in any degree useful or advisable to direct any further proceedings that have already taken place, in the instance of the Sepoy of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion accused of attacking the Malay serjeant, by order of Brigadier Shuldham and in so far as any of the 1st Ceylon Regiment are charged with being concerned in occasioning the death of two Sepoys of the Hon'ble Company's 20th Regiment, which charges will stand for investigation before the regular civil Tribunal.

The Men of the 1st Ceylon Regiment have been too long under the Lieutenant General's Command, and too well trained by their Officers not to know how much any irregularity or excess, besides casting discredit on the Corps, must afflict and displease him. He has only therefore to appeal to their own feelings as gallant and faithful soldiers, to make them sensible of the impropriety of what had occurred and he is equally satisfied that as the same notions of discipline, and the bad consequences of any breach of good order, must be strongly impressed on the soldiers of the Bengal Army, it is unnecessary for him to enlarge further on a subject so painful; but to exhort the troops of the different nations serving His Majesty in Ceylon, to consider each other as brother soldiers, and live together in that state of cordial friendship, which is so necessary to their mutual comfort, and which will be so creditable to them in their military character.

This Order to be translated into the different Languages spoken by the native troops, and to be read at the first parade, each Corps being under Arms, and all the Officers present.

NOTES

¹The term 'native' soldiers is retained here to refer to non-European or non-British soldiers serving in the British army. It is true the use of this term may sound 'colonialistic', but in the context of the times we are dealing with, i.e. 19th century, it brings to mind vividly the situation of Asian people attached to colonial military establishment.

²See chapter 3 for the role of Malay soldiers under the Dutch colonial rule in Sri Lanka. A detailed study based on the Dutch archival documents on the Malay soldiery in Dutch times is yet to be made.

³For details see Hussainmiya (1984) which is due to be published soon by the University Kebangsaan Press.

⁴See Tylden (1952) and Cowan (1860).

⁵For details see De Silva, Colvin R. (1953) and Powell (1973).

⁷For a better account of the rebellion, see Powell (1973) pp. 235-270.

⁸Powell (1973) p. 252.

⁹Powell, (1973) p. 260.

¹⁰Cordiner (1807) Vol. 2, p. 37. Brohier (1984) p. 33 states that in the old maps of the area of Slave-Island, which was then a jagged peninsula, was designated as *Ije*, meaning island, and that name was stuck to it.

¹¹Cordiner (1807), p. Vol. 1. p. 42.

¹²W(ar) O(ffice) 133/14, Brownrigg to Major General Henry Rorrens, 96h July 1819, *Brownrigg Papers, Despatches relating to Military Matter in Ceylon*, pp. 54-56.

¹³As above.

¹⁴What is now known as the Wekande Jumma Mosque in Slave Island was founded in 1786 on a grant made by one Free Javanese, Pandan Balie, and was the only mosque at that time in Slave Island for performing Friday congregational prayers. (See Map of Slave Island).

¹⁵Ceylon Government Gazette, No. 902, Colombo, 2nd January 1819, and *General Orders* (Colombo) of 15th January 1819 (See Appendix).

¹⁶*General Orders* (Colombo) 15th January 1819.

¹⁷Governor Brownrigg's despatch of 9th July-1819 to Horse Guards in London describes the mood of this embarrassment. See note 12, for the source.

¹⁸As above.

¹⁹I have in my possession a Jawi ms. consisting of a collection of sayirs and religious notes (still uncatalogued) donated to me by late Mas Ghaise Weerabangsa. This particular manuscript has a sayair (untitled) which deals with several unrelated themes

such as the appearance of Mahadi in Sudan, on Salvation army, respect for elders and so on. There is also a reference to this 1819 clash in the same text that gives the cause of the fight as an insult suffered by an old Bengali man who was having good relations with his neighbourly Malays in the Slave Island. The handwriting of the manuscript seems to be that of Mas Anum Weerabangsa, the copyist of our *Syair KKOWB*. The former syair give the impression that the story of 1819 clash was still related in the late 19th century.

²⁰From the context, it would appear as if these stories to which our poet refers are themselves circulated in the form of *syairs*, and hence the need to counter them in his own syair. Perhaps, it may be conjectured that there were several others in the community who wrote on the same theme which are now lost.

²¹Abdul Kadir Munshi's syair is edited in Skinner (1973) p. 22–55.

²²Information from Colophon of manuscript 1 of *Syair Syaikh Fadlun*, which is in my possession.

²³The copies of this newspaper could not be traced until now.

²⁴These manuscripts are deposited under Hussainmiya collections Sri Lanka National Archives (Lot No. 25.50).

²⁵Weera Wanxa, Captain, Date of Commission 9-12-1802 Date of Rank 30-04-1801 *The Ceylon Government Gazette* No. 45 of 12th January 1803.

²⁶Manuscripts once belonged to Mas Ghaise's father Mas Anum Weerabangsa got disbursed in the collections of latter's daughter Mas Merbani Salim, his son-in-law Cuncheer of Kandy, and son, Mas Dameel Weerabangsa. In my estimate most manuscripts I have come across were in possession of Weerabangsa family.

²⁷Baba Ounus Saldin was perhaps one of the better 'calligraphic' copyist of manuscript His Msas. (nearly 10) are now in the possession of his great grandson Mr. Durham Saldin.

²⁸He has copied, in my estimate big volumes of manuscripts such as the bulky *Hikayat Kobad Syah Ariffin*, *Hikayat Amir Hamza* and several lengthy religious kitabs. Some of which were kindly donated to me by late Mrs. Merbani Salim Nee Weerabangsa.

²⁹For example, Abdul Kadir Munshi's *Syair Kampung Gelam Terbakar*, ed. Skinner (1973).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brohier, R. L. 1984. *Changing Face of Colombo (1502–1972)*. Colombo. *Ceylon Government Gazette*. 1819, No. 902, Colombo, January, 2nd.
- Chaer, Abdul. 1976. *Kamus Dialek Melayu Jakarta – Bahasa Indonesia*. Jakarta.
- Cordiner, The Rev. James. 1807. *A Description of Ceylon*. Two Vol. London.
- Cowan, H. L. 1860. *History of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment*. *Colburn's United Services Magazine*, Pt. III, Nov., 323–327.
- de Silva, Colvin, R. 1953. *Ceylon Under the British Occupation*. revised ed. Vol. 1. Colombo.
- Drewes, G. W. J. 1969. *The Admonitions of Seh Bari*. *Bibliotheca Indonesia*, vol. 4. The Hague.
- Gibb, H. A. R. ed. 1960. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Leiden-London.
- Iskandar, Raja bin Raja Muhamad Zaid. *Sha'er Burong Punggok*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Powell, Geoffrey. 1973. *The Kandyan Wars: The British Army in Ceylon 1803–1818*. London.
- Teeuw, A. 1966. *The Malay Syair: Problems of Origins and Tradition*. *BKI*, 122: 429–446.
- . *Syair Ken Tambuhan*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Teuku Iskandar. 1984. *Kamus Dewan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Turner, L. J. B. 1919. *The Military Establishments in the Maritime provinces of Ceylon*.

- 1798–1805. *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*, V. 5., No. 2, Oct. 55–69.
- Tylden, Major G. 1952. The Ceylon Regiments, 1796–1874. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, V. 30: 124–128.
- Skinner, C. ed. 1963. *Sya'ir Perang Mengkasar*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal, -Landen-en Volken Kunde Deel 40, 'S Gravenhage.
- . ed. 1973. Sha'er Kampong Gelam Terbakar. *JMBRAS*, 45(1): 21–26.
- Wilkinson, (n.d). *A Malay-English Dictionary*. 2 vols. (Mytilene).
- Yule and Brunell. 1959. *Hobson-Jobson*. London.