MYSTICISM IN MALAYA

A.G.S. DANARAJ
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by
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Published by Asia Publishing Company, Singapore
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HASRAT MEMBENA KA-ARAH KEMAJUAN

Mysticism has always been and is a subject of local interest in this country. Yet, very few Malaysian authors have endeavoured to study or do a research and compile books on this intriguing subject.

I have read this book with spellbound interest, which gives a fascinating account of the various aspects of Malay Mysticism and in particular, the work of Bomohs. I am amazed how the author, Mr. A. G. S. Danaraj, was able to meet more than three-hundred Bomohs in Malaya and Singapore during his research, as I know that most of these men of mystery would not talk on this subject, allow photographs to be taken or even reveal their divine secrets.

I could imagine how difficult a task would have been to compile this book, which I regard as an excellent literary contribution to Malaysian culture. The author certainly deserves a special mention for his fine efforts towards this field.

A book on no account to be missed—a Must for every Malaysian reader and the tourist.

(ABU BAKAR BIN ZAINAL, P.J.K.)
State Adult Education Officer, Pahang.
Chapter I

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO MYSTICISM IN MALAYA

Long before the introduction of mysticism in Malaya, Hinduism had encouraged the local spiritualists to fortify their powers and command the wonders of the credulous by ascetic practices.

It was believed that the white Jinn (spirit) lives in the sun and guards the gates of the sky, and that he had a brother with seven heads, called MAHARAJA DEWA, a Malay version of Mahadeva — the SIVA. It is interesting to note that some Malays had paid homage to SIVA as NATARAJA, lord of dancers and king of actors. Incidentally BATARA GURU or divine teacher is the Malay name for SIVA. Not surprising to find that on accepting Hindu deities into the spirit world, some Malays had paid homage to SIVA under his sinister aspect of KALA, the destroyer of life.

Furthermore, in Malay Mythology, there is a spectre Huntsman, whom they identify as SIVA. This spectre Huntsman was popularly known as “RAJA OF GHOSTS”. According to Hindu Mythology, BRAHMA, or later belief VISHNU, took the form of a boar, and raised the earth out of waters. Muslim cosmogony definitely places the earth on a bull with 40 horns, having 7,000 branches, a beast whose body stretches from east to west. So the early Malay mystic or medicine man had invoked — “the father and the chief Jinn practising austerity in the stall of the black bull who supports the fans and shakes the world”.

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The wife of SIVA, known as MAHADEWI, “the great goddess”, as KUMARI, “the damsel”, and SRI — goddess of rice fields.

The Hindu demons and demigods have found a definite place in Malayan Mysticism. The early medicine men had often chanted, “the sword of VISHNU is before his face”, to protect him. The Hindu Gods continue to survive in invocations degraded to Malayan charms.

A common feature in Malayan Mysticism is ancestor worship which is very popular in this country, especially among the Malays. The origin of ancestor worship is simple to understand. In the dreams, the dead appears to the living, or the dead may be born again in a child who is the image of the forefather. Some Malays pray at the grave of an ancestor to beget a child. The ritual by which one acquires the supernatural powers, suggests that originally the Malay Mysticisian’s familiars were spirits of the dead.

Some Muslims make vows to prophets and saints imploring their aid in the hour of need. In Singapore, many vows are sworn at the shrine of Hahib Noh, a clerk of the last century who gave up life for religious asceticism until he could appear in “several places”. There are the graves of Dato Naning in Anson Road, Singapore; of Sheik Mohammed and Sheik Ahmed on Bukit Gedong in Malacca; the burial ground of an old Achinese woman Bomoh in Kamunting, Perak; the graves of Sheik Sentang at Temerloh Pahang; of To’ Panjang at Kuala Pahang and To’ Panjang at Ketapang in Pekan, Pahang.

These are sacred tombs, which exist throughout Malaya and Singapore bearing an Arabic name KERAMAT. A popular shrine is that of the tomb of Sultan Iskandar, the mythical Malay Ruler of ancient Singa-
போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக்
செயலணுக்கு

பல நாடாணி

1964 ஆம் ஆண்டு மார்ச் 31 ஆம் தேதி போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு வழங்கப்பட்ட தமிழ் பதிப்பு எழுப்புதல். போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு பொருளாதாரத்தில் ஒரு முக்கிய செயல்தொடர்களின் கீழ் கால்நடைகள் பதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. இத்தகு செயலணுக்கு போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு கீழ் கால்நடைகள் பதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. இத்தகு செயலணுக்கு என போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு பதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. இத்தகு செயலணுக்கு என போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு பதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. இத்தகு செயலணுக்கு என போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு பதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. இத்தகு செயலணுக்கு என போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு பதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. இத்தகு செயலணுக்கு என போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு பதிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன. 

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போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக் செயலணுக்கு என போமோஹ் ஆங்கிலக்

செயலணுக்கு

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pore, whose grave can be found at the slopes of Fort Canning, Singapore.

Anthropology and history confirm the various stages in the development of Malayan mysticisms. First, he was an animist of Javanese origin. He was mainly engaged in hunting, fishing, planting and healing the sick.

Next came the SHAMAN. The Shaman medicine man relied solely on charms and invocations. A Shaman might have been a Malay or a Siamese woman. (Shamanism was the native religion of the Ural-Altaic peoples of Behring Straits to the borders of Scandinavia and probably of the early Mongol — Tartar peoples in China and Tibet. The Shaman retains his pride and place among the aboriginal tribes in Malaya).

When Islam came, the Shaman sat at the feet of the pundits, studied their arts of divination and borrowed their cabbalistic talismans. He may seclude himself for days or fast to see visions.

A medicine man of this type is generally a disciple of the crude form of SUFISM, derived from India. So time changed the Malay brother of the Siberian Shaman into a relative of the SUFI mystic. SUFI mysticism teaches the doctrine that the soul is the subject of Ecstasies of Divine inspiration in virtue of its direct emanation from the Deity. It is connected with the idea that the soul is imprisoned in the body and that death is the return to its original home.

And today, we have in our modern society — the BOMOH. (Malay Medicine Man).
Chapter II

THE WORK OF THE BOMOH

In the enlightened age of ours today with its modern hospitals, surgery and ‘wonder drugs’ there are many people in Malaya and in Singapore who have absolute faith in the Bomoh. Some of Malaya’s mysticisms are linked with or radiated from these men of mystery. Bomoh is a Malay word which means Medicine Man. In its broader sense it may even attribute to a doctor, habib, pundit, hakim or a sinseh. The Bomohs are consulted by all races in Malaya.

The main task of a Bomoh is healing and divination. His familiar spirits possessing him as their medium, descend as a seance to cure sick, to propitiate evil spirits, foretell future or to provide answers on human problems. By auto-suggestion he falls into a trance and the spirits speak through his mouth — all these are features of the work of a Bomoh to influence the spirit world.

Some of the Bomohs have been credited by their patients with feats which are beyond the scope of Western science and medicine. The Bomohs in Malaya and Singapore have healed some patients from bed of death completely and instantaneously while the doctors in attendance had stopped all further treatment as being hopeless. These miraculous cures by spiritual power have been investigated by some medical men and they had to admit that the healing was beyond their understanding. How they achieved this remains one of Malaya’s biggest unsolved mysteries. Some of the results produced by the Bomohs have baffled doctors and scientists who are apt to scoff at the mysterious ways of these men. They live outwardly apart, keeping alive the divine secrets which life and fate have conspired to confide in their care. There are various types of Bomohs in the different states in Malaya and in the State of Singapore. They use
various methods and implements to treat the sick patient and they have designations which are on the same category as that of Western doctors being classified as surgeons, physicians, gynaecologists, dental surgeons, orthopaedists and other types of specialists. Similarly, Bomohs in Malaya are classified under the headings of Bomoh patah, Bomoh puteri, Bomoh berbagih, Bomoh berjin, Bomoh mindok, Bomoh mokpek, Bomoh gebioh, Bomoh mambang, Bomoh belian, and so on. These Bomohs have not had the opportunities of attending a recognised course of instructions or reading any books or directives to guide them, but only depend on the teachings of the elder Bomohs falling out traditionally on the younger generation. As these teachings are in most cases incomplete, as ill luck will have it, the younger generation of Bomohs are left in the mid-stream but still practicable and appealing to the folks in the kampongs (villages).

Their services are mostly sought by villagers and people living in the far-flung corners of Malaya. Some people in the Kampongs believe that evil spirits cause them illness and the Bomoh is called in to pacify the spirits when they are angry. There are also a number of town and city folk who take the trouble to seek out Bomohs who live out of town, when they are confronted with peculiar human problems. Bomohs are of either sex. They are generally elderly Malays but there is no reason why a Bomoh should not be of any other race, for I know there are Chinese and Indians who are Bomohs!

There are certain fundamental and unalterable principles which govern all Bomohs and one of them is constant meditation. Meditation is one of the basic arts practised by almost every Bomoh. They set aside a little time each day for daily meditation and for daily quietening of the mind. The habit of thought-control is of vital importance to them, and whose neglect leads to worry and woe. Of course the modern