

# Spirit of Maritime in Rida K Liamsi's Poems

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The notion of maritime seems to be a prevalent poetic theme. The energetic enthusiasm of maritime life in facing life challenges is the inspiration for this. This research aims at analyzing the maritime concept, included as represented in four poems written by Rida K. Liamsi, namely *Laut* (Sea), *Tempuling* (Spear), *Pancang Nibung I* (Palm Tree Pole I), and *Kemejan* (Shark). Descriptive method is used to explain maritime concept in the poetry. While the research result will show the discussions of rigorous life obstacles inside life in maritime territory. These poems are a response to Malay eagerness to live in a maritime zone. The poems teach the struggle in life requires persistence. Malay culture is to never surrender to fate, even though every fight will result in both victory and failure. This destiny does not impair their exertion in handling life. The most interesting part is that they recognize the importance of theessesnce of life for struggle is the true heart of life.

**Key words:** poetry, spirit of maritime, Malay people, the essence of life.



#### Introduction

The whole of nature, surroundings, and society are united in an ecosystem proving an inspiration for many poets in writing poetry. In fact, the ecosystem mentioned above could influence concepts or themes of the rhyme. Energy or atmosphere of an ecosystem can somehow activate the poets' inner motivation to write about certain topics for their masterpiece. Since the pre-historical era, literature and art have portrayed circumstances and human interactions, as well as their surroundings (Buell, Heise & Thomber, 2011; Teeuw, 1981). Authors associations with nature and its life circumstances would generate literature with the rich use of metaphor originating from such interactions displaying sociocultural and historical portraits (Pearson, 1994; Pradopo, 1995). The use of metaphor in literature works such as poems leaves such a profound sense of the poetry. Most of the poets use metaphor and parable as a tool of their 'poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish' as discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 4).

The life within the sea or the maritime zone is an interesting subject in poetry writing, this is because the ocean holds various attractions and affinitiy that can be used as parable by poets. The spirit of maritime is a great power that can foster a poet's creativity in producing their poetry. A well-known *Sufi* poet, Hamzah Fansuri in his work *Syair Perahu* (The Vessel Lyrics) and *Syair Kapal dan Perahu* (The boat and Vessel Lyrics) uses numerous parables related to maritime. Hamzah Fansuri in both of his literary works mentioned above explains the divinity realm as a human's life objective by using a lovely oceanic parable (Braginsky, 1993; Ahmad, et.al 2018).

Indonesia as the one of the biggest Southeast Asia countries with maritime territories, and has countless maritime writing potential (Reid, 2004). This potential has been realised in numerous of poems (the maritime contents). One of those Indonesian poets, named Rida K. Liamsi has adopted the spirit of maritime into his works. Hamidy (2010:15) acknowledges Rida K. Liamsi as "a Malay servant who used to play with his friends, looking for mussel at the coastline in the 1940's". Today, Liamsi does not only work as a poet, he is also a successful entrepreneur, who has his hands in lots of companies and business. His accomplishment in literature seems to have been in equal proportion compared to his success in business. The excitement in his poetry could somehow be linked with his eagerness to keep up with his business.



Malay society as the background of Liamsi's poetry writing has its unique characteristics. The hard life in the maritime zone requires a strong and powerful attitude to life struggles. Kusnedi (2010) says some of the characteristics of people living on the coastline of Indonesia is their willingness to increase workload to fulfil their life needs, thirst for competition and ability to count on oneself in order to achieve their success. Their working ethic and enthusiasm appear in several of Liamsi's works. The Malays' bold motivation is actually emphasized by the fact that the society glory determined by its people's perseverance, sincerity, and hard work (Effendy, 2006).

Commonly, the poetry writing process is complex, it includes the integration of events, experience, feeling, and imagination. The complexity of the creative process demonstrated by the poets in generating poetry ideas aims at delivering messages (Pradopo, 1987). Every single one of the poets possesses an idea to convey the readers. The idea or message in the poet is called as the theme, it can come in the form of expression, eagerness, motivation, and criticism. The theme is the stance and purposes of poets, reflected in their works, it is the main concept of a piece of literature (Holman, 1985; Targian, 1993).

In Liamsi's poetry, the Malay maritime spirit and their motivation in facing the life cycle, is a deliberate focus. The sea is shown as an impressive state in his poetry to symbolize life. Hamidy (2010) remarks *tempuling*, a poem by Liamsi could engage the aesthetics as the symbol and analogy of life. The aesthetic will create a condition where life seems graceful within the sea. This theme stretched out gorgeously as the beacon for humans to seek for livelihood and luck. While the waves and coral underneath are seen as the obstacles in facing life. Sutarji Calzoum Bachri, in the preface of Rose (Liamsi, 2013; Zheng & Das 2018) reveals the gusto of Liamsi's poem is pretty much grounded in the root of Malay culture, specifically created to reach the poetic point.

In short, the concepts existing in Liamsi's poetry could encourage the reader to persist to win the variation of life barriers they will face. On the basis of this maritime concept in Liamsi's poems, this research proposes an exploration of the spirit of maritime contained within the poems.

#### Method

This research uses the descriptive method to explain the themes and messages opined in the four of the poems. This analysis relies on linguistic elements more than numbers or numerical data, which is the best choice for the purpose of this paper (Elliott, 1999; Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1983). The main data used in this research is taken from poems by Rida



K. Liamsi, such as *Laut* (Sea), *Tempuling* (Spear), *Pancang Nibung I* (Palm Tree Pole I), and *Kemejan* (Shark). These four poems could be find in the poetry compilation book written by Liamsi (2013) titled *Rose*, and were published in both English and Indonesian. In the analysis process, an in-depth reading technique and paraphrasing are used to reveal the spirit of maritime within the four poems.

#### **Results and Analysis**

The followings are the results of an in-depth reading analysis done toward the four poems :

#### "Laut" [The sea]

Malay life in archipelago cannot be separated from the sea, because the people live on the islands surrounded by the ocean. This "Laut" poem highlights the Malay's life circle in association with the sea. It can be seen from the portrayal of the "I" lyrics, who stands at the edge of a steep bank of the sea carrying a handle of "tempuling"

seperti mereka sediakala [as they were]
akupun berdiri di tebingmu [I am standing on your cliff]
dengan sebatang tempuling [with a spear in hand]

The stanza illustrates the sea as an important part of life since the beginning of time. In fact, the Malay historical perspective in the archipelago has evidenced that the Malay people living in the islands have the "Laut" ethnic (Dahlan, 2014). Tempuling is a spear, useful for fishing. In this poetry, tempuling is explained as the beacon of the people's persistence in enduring through life on the sea. Tempuling is a tool used to seek fortune during the time they spend on the ocean. The triumph and defeat are controlled by the skilfulness in using tempuling.

Malay boldness in facing the sea is pictured similarly to their ability in using the *tempuling*.

Tikam! [Stab!]

Maka ku tikam jejak riakmu [So I stab on your signs in the waves]

yang ku tahu tak siapapun tahu [I know that nobody knows]

dimana tubirmu [where you end]

The stanza above depicts the circumstances of the sea and the Malay who live side by side in a mild and peaceful manner. However, in the second stanza, the situation changes to difficulty when *tempuling* functions as a tool for them for fishing. The description of *tempuling* as used to stab the fish leaves this sense where their everyday life battling the sea is undoubtedly severe. That the invisible ocean lines having no edge is a challenge for the

Malay in undergoing their lifespan. The struggle nuance between Malay and the sea is getting rougher when the implanted *tempuling* is firmly tugged.

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Sentak! [Pull!]

Maka ku sentak tancap harapku [Then I pull out my hopes]

Yang ku tahu tak siapaun tahu [I am sure none knows]

Dimana palungmu [Where your pool is]
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Tempuling that is implanted is being tugged or pulled. This portrays the tough efforts of the Malay to catch the fish in the ocean. Further, this tug movement shows the hope for the inhabitants in their life. The life in the sea does not make them feeling scared nor desperate. These folks have great bravery in sailing the ocean. They do not give up easily on the sea and its nature. Even their ancestors strove, fighting the wilderness of the sea and this demeanour has since been bestowed to the current generations.

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Seperti mereka sediakala [as they were]
akupun tak pernah menyerah [I do not give up]
pada keluasan [to the broadness]
pada kebiruan [to the blueness]
pada untung nasib [o the fate]
yang hanyut dari teluk ke teluk [brought away from one bay to another]
yang terumbang ambing di pundak [oscillating on top]
ombakmu [of your wave]
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The people believe the endeavour to gain livelihood or fortune on the sea will require boundless and never ending enthusiasm. Passing the test of the great obstructions of the ocean does not necessarily guarantee successful results for human. The stretch of the sea and extreme weather may not happen to impede them sailing across the sea. Eagerness to engage in continuous struggle and never lose their hope in life are the basic foundations. Thus, their attempts to catch fish are endlessly carried out in spite of the huge wave coming at them.

The nuance of exertion to get the fish is then illustrated once more by the use of words like "tikam" and "sentak". It is then strengthened by the usage of an exclamation point as well as repetition of those words in this poetry.

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Seperti mereka sediakala [As they were]
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Akupun senantiasa [Then I]
Tikam! [Stab!]
Sentak! [Pull!]
Tikam! [Stab!]
Sentak! [Pull!]
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Tikaaaaammm! [Stab!] Sentaaaakkk: [Pull:]

The bold stabbing and tugging of the *tempuling* emphasizes the huge amount of energy and spirit needed to live within the coastal area. The sea has to be conquered, not the other way around. It appears this way because human beings have certain strategies to survive in life, the strategies to survive are described as similar to what they do in using *tempuling* by the stabbing and pulling techniques (Ahmed, Umrani, Qureshi & Sarmad, 2018; Ali & Haseeb, 2019; Haseeb, Abidin, Hye, & Hartani, 2018; Haseeb., 2019; Suryanto, Haseeb, & Hartani, 2018).

This poetry ends with a stanza depicting life barriers are correlated to fate by means, describing *tempuling*, which becomes salty. In addition to that, is the existence of "*permainan musim*" or seasonal games.

Tempulingku [My spear]
Asinmu [Your salt]
Hanya musim [Is only a season]
Yang bermain [That plays around]

No matter how hard the struggles are, they would still face the fate in front of them, just similar to the salty *tempuling* because of the wave of seawater caused by the "*permainan musim*". Destiny cannot be avoided, changed or hidden from, it is the God who arranges it. Our job as humans is to go thoroughly the struggle, because humans will never know the truth behind their fate. As for the Malay, their belief in fate does not reduce their spirit and continuous strive during their lifespan.

#### "Tempuling" [The Spear]

"Laut" s poem illustrates Malay's capability and bravery in using *tempuling*. While his second poet, "Tempuling" portrays the essence of *tempuling* for the community. In Liamsi's poem *tempuling* is not only a tool in fishing, but it is also the reflection of the enthusiasm in confronting life challenges. The poem begins by exposing the description of *tempuling* found on a beach after a storm by a child returning from school.

Sebatang tempuling tersadai di gigi pantai [a spear lied on the beach] sehabis badai [after a stormy day]
Seorang bocah menemukannya [A kid found it] sehabis sekolah [after school time]

The stanza above shows *tempuling* as the icon of the Malay's enthusiasm in facing God's ordeal. The fact that *tempuling* is stranded, gives the sense that their effort and struggle in



facing the sea have been beaten by the storm. The power of nature, such as a hurricane, has impeded life's efforts. On the other hand, it does not hinder their enthusiasm in the life struggle. The never-give-up enthusiasm has become a strong foundation for the Malay mariners, as pictured in the following stanza:

Tuhan [: God]
Siapa lagi yang kini telah menyerah? [Who is giving up now?]
tak terlihat tanda-tanda [I see no signs]
tak tercium anyir nasib [no fate is smelled]
tak tercatat luka musim [no wound is recorded]
kecuali tangis ombak [except for the tears of the waves]
pekik elang [the screams of the eagles]
yang jauh dan ngilu [from far and in sorrow]
di antara cuaca [within the weather]
dan gemuruh karang [and the thundering coral]

The stanza above highlights the prodigious eagerness of the Malay. That is the reason why they cannot, will not give up, these people never show signs of surrender and do not want to be beaten by fate. Life is a never ending struggle for them. The natural phenomenon such as waves and hurricanes will never diminish their spirit. Further, the next stanza depicts the Malay complaint due to the stranded *tempuling* in the beach:

: tuhan [: God]
Diakah yang kini telah menyerah? [Is it him giving up?]
Telah kalah? [Beaten up?]
: tuhan [: god]
Dia memang telah berbisik [He indeed has whispered]
Pindahkan pancang [Move the poles]
Sebelum pasang [Before the high tides]

This part shows that this society have to stay strong and rise, despite the challenges they are dealing with. The expression of "pindahkan pancang sebelum pasang" provides motivation for humans to stand up after failures and during hardships. Troubles have to be dealt with by using certain strategies to be secure and experience success in life.

Ordeal represented by waves cause the *tempuling* to be marooned on the beach. This fact is inevitable, this triggers blues for the inability to get the fish out of the ocean. The 'I' lyric exposes his sadness for the failure resulting from human endeavour on the sea, it is illustrated by the fallen leaf.

Hatiku memang telah terusik [My heart is tickled]



ketika sehelai waru [when a waru leaf]
gugur [falls]
lesap [slips]
lewat tingkap [through blinds]
tersuruk [hidden]
di antara tungku [among the stoves]
menunggu gelap [expecting dark]

This depiction details struggle, humans will somehow meet the various impediments that are there to defeat them. The breakdown itself are the consequences to be accepted. Nevertheless, for the citizen, to lose does not literally mean to surrender. A defeat is accepted, but giving up is never on their list of choice.

In the last part of the poem, there is a description about the *tempuling* discovered by a child in sorrow:

Sebatang tempuling tersadai di gigi pantai [A spear lied on the beach] sehabis badai [after a stormy day]
Seorang bocah merasakan pelupuknya [the kid feels his eyelid]
Telah basah [got wet]

This child's sadness means the anxiety appears whenever a Malay relinquishes to natural forces. This image reminds us that we should not give up because unlimited enthusiasm will enliven our future.

The last stanza closes the poem by narrating the grief of that child, related to the presence of *tempuling* on the beach. It can be simply found from the mourning of "I" lyrics praying to the God with hopes that somebody will uncover the hidden *tempuling*, this person hopefully will bury it in the beach with an omen to be found again. This child hopes this *tempuling* is not forever gone due to the currents.

: Tuhan (: God)

Bawalah seseorang menemukannya [Get someone to discover it]

Menguburkannya di antara pantai [To burry it in the beach]

Memberikan satu tanda [With a sign]

Dan jangan biarkan arus [And do not let the waves]

membawanya jauh ke lubuk dalam [Sweep it back into the far away gulf]

yang aku pun tak tahu [Somewhere I do not know]

dimana akan kutuliskan [where to address]

rinduku [my longing]



The closing implies the natural realm has indeed dominated and controlled human life. Yet, the struggle will actually be remembered and it may inspire others to deal with their own. This indicates that a defeat obtained after a struggle will not be in vain. On another note, failure does not always reflect weakness.

"Pancang Nibung I" [The Palm Tree Pole I]

The title itself has given us the impression of power or eagerness in undergoing life. A stake or 'pancang' is a wood stabbed into the ground. Each stake has to be sturdy. If the stake is weak it will cause instability to houses or other buildings on the top of the stake. In Malay tradition, a stake is the symbol of power. There is also a tradition of constructing houses together in the community. This aims at consolidating capacity in handling life. In this poem, this stake comes from the *nibung* tree. Malay societal life in the archipelago has familiarity with *nibung* tree due to its use in house construction. This tree is strong, and its height could reach up to 20 meters. The strength of this tree has become a basis for the tile "Pancang Nibung".

The poem demonstrates how firm the *nibung* stands over the sea, though the stake has been aged down there and struck by the waves every day. The strength consistent in *nibung* represents the eagerness in going through difficult phases of life in Malay souls. Even though their life is filled with obstacles and uncertainty, they remain enthusiastic in confronting daily life.

Pancang Nibung [The Palm Tree Pole]
di surut berdengung [sounding in frictions]
teritip ngelembung [and teritip grows]
di musim bersabung [in the seasons of combat]

Part of the stanza above describes that *pancang nibung* causes thunderous sounds when it moves. It looks like a snail sticking to the *nibung*. In this stanza, the use of identical rhyme is obviously noticed in every last line. The emerging sound effect gives an impression of oceanic tones. This stanza gives us the sense that '*pancang nibung*' is a human's willingness to keep struggling and trying in life. Gusto is a foundation which controls human movement. Once the foundation is strong enough, then people are eager to live life. Otherwise, once it is fragile, people's effort may be weakened. Truthfully, human beings will always face innumerable life obstacles, which keep coming like intermittent seasons. Therefore, it is fundamental to possess an enormous amount of enthusiasm.

In this poem, 'pancang nibung' is the beacon of hope for Malay people. The force of 'pancang nibung' is to support life. Additionally, this poem gives an insight into how life and



hopes cannot always be satisfied with the power of spirit. Countless and serious attempts and struggles do not always met the expected results. Still, this informs 'pancang nibung' as a core of human readiness to sustain lifespan. Many of the expectations in life cannot always be be achieved as planned as illustrated in the following verse:

Sudah beribu perahu [Thousands of vessels]
tambat [posted]
beribu kail [thousands of hooks]
beribu kail [thousands of hooks]
redam [muffled]
beribu umpan [thousands of baits]
lesap [slipped]
beribu pagut [thousands of bites]
kuput [disappeared]
beribu harap [thousands of hopes]
lepas [gone]
beribu tunggu [thousands of intervals]
lalu [gone]

This verse displays the resulting feeling when some expectations cannot be attained. Nonetheless, individuals ought to continuously experience passions and keenness. Furthermore, this poem portrays various problems found by humans as in fact tricks of nature that pass. Despite the intermittent challenges, 'pancang nibung' or a spear as the symbol of mankind's spirit, should not be let down. A natural game depicting that copious mankind life complication exist is evdient in the verse below.

Tapi cuma ombak [But only waves]
cabar arus [pale currents]
cuma arus [only currents]
gempur perahu, [hit the vessels]
cuma perahu [only vessels]
goyangkan pancang [shake the poles]

This stanza shows waves and currents might at some points strike a boat, but only the boat could move its 'pancang'. It tries to link the natural influence of the sea current and waves as a metaphor for the troubles mankind must face in life, with mankind and human being symbolized by boats in the poem.

The rigorous life challenges do not just stop at the waves and thunder, but are then exemplified by the attack of a shark. The shark, with its power and wildness, happens to be



the human enemy. However, the existence of the shark has never affected Malay people's spirit to pursue what they want and need. The last verse of this poetry emphasizes the position of *pancang nibung*.

Pancang nibung [The palm tree pole]
di surut berdengung [sounding in frictions]
teritip ngelembung [and teritip grows]
dimusim bersabung [in the seasons of combat]
cuma waktu [only time]
mencabutmu [could pull you]
dari terumbu [out of the coral reef]

The positive vibes flow in the poem. *Pancang nibung* has become the icon of motivation in life to endure. Life for the human is not easy, life is a struggle and humans must tackle the difficulties. In a Malay perspective, only death will stop the spirit in living life. Hence, as long as mankind exists, there will exist a need to fight and strengthening exertion, just like *pancang nibung* is embedded into the ground.

#### "Kemejan" [The Shark]

The poem titled "Shark" centres on the abundance of enthusiasm in life and the never give up ethic. This could be seen through how the fishermen are illustrated as having their way and the effort in seizing the shark. Life is a never-ending battle that has to conquer at all costs.

Ke lubuk paling ceruk manakah kau [To which deep pool will you]

Akan menyuruk [Hide]

Ke palung paling ujung manakah kau [To which end will you]

Akan berselindung [Take a shelter]

Akan sampai juga jejak tempuling [The spear will soon arrive]

*Menghentak punggung* [To shake the back]

Membiarkan engkau [Letting you]

*Melepas dendam zaman* [Release the revenge]

Ke pucuk laut [till the edge of the sea]

Throughout this poetry, the readers could feel the battle between the *tempuling* and the *shark*. *Tempuling* is the beacon of struggle, which the shark designates as their enemy which has to be defeated. The verse above explains that *tempuling* is put to use as a tool to kill the shark. The expression of the shark as having to be defeated' illustrates their spirit.

This poem certainly frames life as the battle that requires boundless gusto in order to beat opponents.



Apalagi rahasiamu memenangkan pertarungan ini? [What is your secret to win this fight?]

Ada padamu ombak [It is on the waves]

tapi tak badai [not the storm]

Ada padamu arus [It is on you current]

tapi tak berangin [not the wind]

Ada padamu taring [It is on you tusks]

tapi tak bergeming [yet defective]

Apalagi rahasiamu... [What other secret do you have...]

*Kecuali lubuk* [Except the deep pool]

kemana sebelum menyerah [where would you, before giving up]

kau akan kembali [to return]

This verse shows the tenacity of the people to conquer life barriers. There is a fisherman exposed in the verse, striving his best to defeat the shark.

The fight amidst 'I' and the *tempuling* implies the essence of life. Though human and shark have been destined to be in a state of hostility to survive in life, the honour of the fight itself needs to be respected. As a matter of fact, the 'I' lyric has succeeded in murdering the shark and he believes that there is a determinative association between him and the shark. 'I' lyric realizes that he was destined to kill the shark. Though in the process of the fight and in confronting the shark, he is respectful and arrives at a realization of the significance of what he is doing. The value of life struggle is then conveyed at the end of the following verse:

Ketika kau hitung detak detik [When you count each second]

*jejak langkahmu* [of your step]

di antara amis musim [among the swift of the seasons]

di antara ngilu waktu [among the pain of time]

di antara tikam [among the stabbings]

dan kilat tempuling [and the gleam of the spears]

kecuali pekik pedihmu [except for your saddening screams]

: Tuhan [: God]

inikah nasibku [is it my destiny]

inikah cintamu [is it your love]

Through the verse above, there is an indication that there is a force of fortune or the fates in human life itself and it is our responsibility to try and give their best effort in facing it. Mankind needs to discover the purpose of life and existence themselves. This whole meaning is perceived when the 'I' lyrics kill the shark with love and compassion instead of as would

the a natural rival. Simply, it could be concluded that life essence is vital to living life in this world. The most profound meaning of life is the matter of effort and determination mankind put into it. Huge and firm endeavours are the soul of life.

#### Conclusion

An in-depth and profound reading of Rida K Liamsi's poety results in a conclusion that the life of the Malay in the maritime area is full of challenges. These people are highly motivated to get through life. The poetry "Laut" depicts the strength of their struggles in resisting the challenges of the sea. They have to work thoroughly to survive. As displayed in the "tempuling", their efforts in living on the sea endure many obstructions.

The ocean with its waves and storms has thrown down the spear which means that people are defeated by nature. Nevertheless, in the face of such failure, the spirit remains to struggle since the Malay deem that the core meaning of life is the struggle. It is prohibited for them to give up to fate. Further, the poem "Pancang Nibung I" [The Palm Tree Pole I] stresses again the importance of eagerness in facing life. Huge enthusiasm is the power to persist against the natural forces. Lastly, the poem "Kemejan" [Shark] depicts the Malay people's attempts at beating the sharks. With their enthusiastic efforts, they have succeeded in defeating the shark.

Nonetheless, in beating the shark, they are depicted as respecting the nature of both losing and winning the battle. It is not winning or losing that matters, but more about how every endeavour and sacrifice possess meaning. Additionally, respecting the natural law is seriously taken into account. Although humans ought to kill the sharks and will sometimes be beaten by nature, this process has to respected as a representation of life struggle.

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