

BOOK REVIEW

Hatta Azad Khan, 2015.
Teater Filem dan Pengurusan Seni.
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INTRODUCTION

On the blurb of the book, it is stated that this is a “booklet” for students studying creative arts, managers and practitioners of creative and artistic industry in the country. Nevertheless, it is a compilation of all the thoughts, knowledge and experiences of a writer who amasses as a thinker, administrator, and at the same time an activist, so much so that this book is not a “booklet”. Hatta Azad Khan does not write just based on observations and academic studies on the tradition of an academician, but he is the man who feels the pulses of the creative arts activities he talks about.

Although the book is the compilation of his ideas concerning films and theatres he projected from various seminars he had participated as a presenter of his working paper, however, the writings and statements he proposes is also based on his true experience. More information regarding this is given in the Forward of this book written by Hatta himself. The Forward befits a chapter of the book accounting Hatta’s life background, starting from his kampong in Jerneh, Terengganu, the place where he begins to know the world of film through his experience watching the film “Bajar Cinema”. It was the effect of his sense of being overwhelmed by the beauty of the painting on the film’s poster displayed on the cinema’s wall. Bajar Cinema was the only cinema in Jerneh or in Pasir Putih (Panggung Rama). The Lido, Odeon, Rex, Meena and Rani cinemas were in Kota Bharu Kelantan. The names of cinemas mentioned have now become part of a history in the country’s film industry. They are now obsolete. The disappearance of these cinemas is not

only the effect from the development of the national film industry and the revolution of the world film industry, but also due to the direct effect of the socioeconomic changes of the society. The cinemas or *pawagam* (*panggung wayang gambar*) has changed its traditional form (a special building) to the “cineplex” with its modern contraptions and built in big shopping complexes. To manage a cinema in its own building is not economical and the change in the life style of the society that disregard the cinemas for movies because there are various forms of entertainment available and easy to choose.

From Jerteh, Hatta not only became acquainted with the film world but it was the same world that made his initial capital into the world of “stage drama” and drawing. This small experience later propel him to study to the university, where he became active with theatre with other students who introduced him to the names of other theatre activists such as Johan Jaaffar, Dinsman, Mana Sikana and Zakaria Ariffin (theatre activists product of the university). His theatre activities and his films went along parallel with his academic excellent achievements until he attained the level of head of the faculty and now he is the Rector of the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA). From a film viewer to be a film director, he started his first film *Mat Som* (1990); from being a theatre activist to an academic figure who manages the first academy in the country. As a dramatist, Hatta was awarded the Anugerah Penulisan Asia Tenggara (S.E.A. Write Award) in 2008 and in same year, he was also awarded the National Academic Award for his excellent contribution as an academic figure at the university.

An Indian film personality, Satyajit Ray said, “A film maker rarely writes about films.” What is interesting Ray added, “Quite a number of film critics have given up writing and switched over to film making,” when he referred to the film critics in the film journal *Cahiers du Cinema* such as Jean-Luc Godard, Jean Renoir and Francois Truffaut. The same happened to Hatta, from a critic to a film director. However, according to Asrul Sani, an Indonesian film personality, it is necessary to publish a book on the critiques and ideas concerning films. Firstly, the function of the critiques is important not only for film producers but also the filmgoers. Secondly, it is the historical factor. If someone is interested in the history of the county’s films, he should read the critiques and the thoughts of the critics and film thinkers such as Hatta. Therefore, with Hatta’s extensive, profound and excellent background, that gives the reason why this book is not just a booklet but an essential book written not only based on scholarly research but filled with true experience.

THE ART OF THEATRE AND FILM

This book is the collection of Hatta's working papers on his writings and thoughts encompassing the world of theatre and film for 28 years. The papers are from his earliest on the "Aspek Teater dalam Filem" (The Aspect of Theatre in Film) which he presented in the Film Critiques Workshop in 1981 to 2009, in the paper on "Proses Kreatif Tiga Teater Muzikal dan Muzikal Kampung Baru" (The Creative Process of Three Musical Theatres and Musical Kampung Baru) which he presented in the Majlis Bicara Karya Hatta Azad Khan at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang. This book is the collection of 18 working papers, comprising two distinct chapters. One is the chapter on Theatre and Film that contains nine papers; and the other on Arts Management that contains eight papers.

In the first chapter of the book, *Aspek Teater dalam Filem* (the Aspect of Theatre in Films), the author compares the similarities and differences between theatre and films. Then he sees how they influence each other in the development of both media. Although the contents of both media are very close which elevates the life of the people, however both media, that is films and theatre have two different approaches from the historical and physical reality aspect, especially from the aspect of time and space. Theatre emerges earlier, but films emerges later (starting 1895) overcoming the popularity of the theatre. Towards the year 1926 to 1927 the process called "re-theatricalization" took place, and later from the year 1928-1929 the theatre people went into films to "teach the film to speak" – when the history of talking films began. In this chapter too Hatta talks about the shifting or adaptation from theatre to film.

In second the chapter of the book, *Peranan Drama dan Filem dalam Pembinaan Bahasa Melayu* (the Role of Drama and Film in the Construction of the Malay Language), the author sees the importance of effective language and best used in the writings of stage drama and film scripts. Even though films are often not regarded as literature as it is seen as a work of art, however, Hatta has the belief that drama and film begin with literature and ends with its own special feature, yet still maintaining the literary characteristics (page 30). Although the author's argument can be debated, Hatta has put forward his reasons. Both use the language of writing, and drama and film screenplay scripts are also the work of art that can be enjoyed by reading them before or after they are staged or filmed. Because of that, drama especially films are often ignored in literary discussions.

Hatta continues his argument on the aspect of better use, effective and beautiful language in the chapter on *Penghasilan Skrip Proses Produksi: Beberapa Cabaran Masa Kini* (The Script Creation of Production Process: Some Present Challenges). Specifically this chapter discusses the weakness in scripts or film screenplays produced by the writers in this country, that later leads to affect the production of the contents or low quality story lines for film. The author sees the effect of the story weakness on the Malaysian majority (Malays), the film viewers who are carried away in comfort with scary films or cheap comedy. The author's view is in agreement with Salim Said's, who takes the views of Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy who wrote, when a film is liked by many people, it is clear that the film reflexes something on majority viewers forming the identification of themselves. Salim takes this view to see the connection between the mentality of the Indonesian public viewers with the popular and selling films in Indonesia, while quality films fail to get the support of many viewers. The critical author's argument is in fact related to the proposed mission "Our Film Our Face" and "Malaysian Films for the International Arena".

In chapters 4-6 which is *Sinografi: Komunikasi dan Ekspresi Visual dalam Teater* (Scenography: Communication and Visual Expression in Theatre) and *Teater Generasi Ketiga, dan Proses Kreatif Tiga Teater Muzikal* (The Third Generation Theatre, and the Creative Process of the Three Musical) Theatre, Hatta explains the importance of scenography in a performance. Basically, scenography is the new terminology in the Malaysian scene of theatre, being all the visual elements present and happening on stage after curtains up. The term refers to - from the design of the stage, costume of performers, set and prop, including the lightings.

The Third Generation Theatre with the motto "Theatre in the Hands of the Theatre People" discussed in this chapter refers to the staging activities by the lovers of generation theatre who are mostly the product of the university. Their emergence is also due to the effect of the lack luster condition of the performing theatre in terms of response and contents. The young theatre activist questioned the weak effort by the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports (KKBS) then, and the need of a National Arts complex.

In the creative process of the three theatre musicals, Hatta wrote the creative process of writing and his experience as the director in producing three musical theatres, i.e. *Muzikal Kampung Baru* (The Kampung Baru Musical), *Muzikal Pi Mai Pi Mai Tang Tu* (The Pi Mai Pi Mai Tang Tu Musical) and *Muzikal Ram* (The Ram Musical), and also *Muzikal Kuala Lumpur* (the Kuala Lumpur Musical). This is an important chapter since the experience

of writing a musical theatre, which is regarded as a new theatre genre in this country, even though the Drama *Uda dan Dara* by Usman Awang had long since been staged. In fact, the bangsawan stage show incorporates the form of acting and singing, but the concept of the Malay bangsawan is so much different from the musical theatre concept.

The description regarding the differences of approach in acting in theatres and in film is in the chapter on *Lakonnan dalam Filem dan Teater di Malaysia* (Acting in Film and Theatre in Malaysia). This chapter explains the importance of acting aspect surpass the element of beauty of the actor on stage. This is because there is the tendency of seeing the beauty of the actor on stage as the main attraction of the theatre. The author also discusses on the association of film actors to the theatre stage and vice versa. The phenomena of film actor to the theatre is the effort staging that brings well-known film actor to act on stage in a one-scene drama theatre series staged at MATIC Kuala Lumpur, an effort introduced by Sufiat Mukri, the 1970s theatre activist and the first director of the National Culture Complex. His intention is to attract the public to see the theatre. His effort resulted in getting an encouraging response to the theatre.

Hatta also sees P. Ramlee's strength as a personality actor in various film genres he acted. The superiority of P. Ramlee's act is commented in many aspects meticulously, and Hatta also explains the reasons for the decline in P. Ramlee's filming activities after he moved to Studio Merdeka Hulu Kelang. The descent of P. Ramlee and the problems of film viewings are commented interestingly in the chapter on *Penontonan Filem di Pawagam Malaysia* (Film Viewing in Malaysian Cinemas). The author sees the conditions and film viewing problems in Malaysia by comparing them with the making of films in Iran and Korea. Hatta also brings out the problems between social demands and the real fact regarding national films.

"It is impossible to make good theatre without good stage management," says Sir Peter Hall in the introduction of the book on stage management by Thomas A. Kelly (1991). The same too happens when regarding the impossibility the activities of the arts of theatre and films are able to develop better without the understanding and the existence of the art of management for both fields in this country. A good arts management is very essential in the government context to upgrade the creative industry as an important national industry in the government's effort to transform the conventional economy to the creative economy. Creative industry is the principle element in the new economy having the creative and arts activities as the focal point.

In 2012, the government accepted the importance of the creative industry

in the effort to increasing the innovation and standard of living in the country in the drive to make the country as a developed nation. Apart from that, creative industry has been identified as one of important generator of the country's economy. For that reason the year 2012 is regarded as the nation's year of innovation and creativity and the government has reserved RM200 million as the fund to generate and to develop the country's creative industry.

Creative industry has become one of the essential instruments in the Government Transformation Program introduced in the year 2010 and Economy Transformation Program introduced in a year later. Both the programs later formed the National Transformation Policy. The Policy introduced as the government initiative in the effort to assure that the country will be a high-income nation by 2020.

Creative industry refers to industry/manufacture based on talent, skill and creativity of an individual that has the potential to create work and wealth by building the "intellectual property". This creative economy indeed gives its own impact to the effort of promoting a variety of culture and the humane development resulting from the inter-related actions between creativity, culture, economy and technology as it does in the effort to create and to activate the intellectual capital.

In the second chapter, the author concentrates on the discussion in the good management of arts in the effort of putting the national arts and creative industry on the right platform. Starting with the topic of Marketing the Literary Work where the author tries to sees that the book does not just stop after its publication, but instead there should be an effort to develop it further to another medium such as adapting it to film.

The author discusses more specifically on the issues and aspect of the management of cultural arts in chapters 11 to 17. Those are regarding the Strategic Issues in the Culture of Performing Arts Management, Kuala Lumpur as the centre of excellent arts, the cultural and creative industries in its globalization context, Istana Budaya, and the Excellence in Performing Arts. Hatta's analysis in these chapters is not just based on the argument from the aspect of academic, observation, or comparison with the aspect of arts management of foreign countries, but what is important is his experience as the Director General of Istana Budaya for four years, from 2001 to 2005. Thus, this book specializes on his experience in managing Istana Budaya mainly in his effort to put quality and set the benchmark on the performance at Istana Budaya at the level of world-class performance. Among the world-class performance that Hatta has staged as the Director General are The

Fame, The Cats, Chang & Eng.

However, having a state-of-the-art theatre such as of Istana Budaya or a theatre performance of world-class quality is meaningless unless attended and appreciated by the audience. Hatta believes that apart from getting the interest the audience, the Malaysian society should also be educated with the stage art with quality. Apart from that what is more important is marketing the theatre and stage shows at Istana Budaya and in Malaysia to the public viewers. This is the subject Hatta expresses in the chapter on the *Kecemerlangan Seni Pentas* (Excellence in Performing Arts).

CONCLUSION

The book ends with the chapter on the *Kesenian dan Intelektual* (Art and the Intellectual), a very relevant chapter in the development of the art of films and theatre. In reality Hatta is always confident on the strength of literature that should be the basic that supports the production of drama and the art of films. This assurance has always been the focus in Hatta's argument in this book. However, Hatta is always aware that the art of theatre and films cannot deflect from the aspect of the intellectual. The chapter that ends Hatta's argument in the book makes his conclusion significant that states where he stands as regard to arts, Practitioner, User and Intellectual in the arts of theatre and films.

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(Translated by Saripah Haji Wahid)