

## Environmental Ethics in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* (Malay Proverbs)

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### ABSTRACT

Humans utilize land and its natural resources to fulfil their needs. The over exploitation of nature have damaged both nature and human. Therefore, humans should have standards of conduct which function to distinguish right and wrong in utilizing nature and its natural resources. The standards of conducts in utilizing nature and environmental are called as environmental ethics. Right and wrong are determined by moral values believed in certain societies. Malays have local environmental ethics in viewing nature and environment. This research aims to find out environmental ethics in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* (Malay proverbs). By analyzing the text of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*, it is found that Malay have strong environmental ethics. The principles of environmental ethics in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* are based on customs, minds, morals, inheritance and religion. These ethics suggest people to use land and its natural resources based on certain right behavior and attitudes.

**Keywords:** *Environmental Ethics, Culture, Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*

### INTRODUCTION

We are currently facing the environmental crisis in the local and global context. Humans think that "nature increasingly hostile". All aspects of human life are related to nature and environment. In fact, there are many people exploit nature for the sake of economy and they do not care about saving nature and environment. Besides, the activities of saving nature and environment are very helpful for human life. Therefore, we must continue to engage in activities that aim to save nature and environment.

The relationship between culture and environment are very close because cultures are used to adopt with nature and environment. It means that human and their cultures are an integral part of the environment" (Sutton and Anderson, 2010: 2) Humans keep adapting themselves to the environment where they live. Cultures certainly have taught us how care for nature but humans still harm nature.

The environmental crisis is caused by harmful actions on nature and environment. Humans have harm nature so that now nature is show its anger to humans. We are often taught to be kind to human beings but we often neglects to do good things to nature so that we are freely to exploit nature. It is true that nature may be utilized by humans, but humans must keep the environmental balance. Our neglectfulness to keep environmental balance causes many disasters. Floods and

346

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landslides often occur as a result of humans' neglectfulness to keep the forest. The global warming is also caused by humans' failure to keep environmental balance.

In utilizing environment and natural resources human should follow the environmental ethics. Ethics are the ways how we should behave and the environmental ethics are set of ethics applied to the environment by society. The important of the environmental ethics is summarized by Rolston (2003).

Environmental quality is necessary for quality of human life. Humans dramatically rebuild their environments; still, their lives, filled with artefacts, are lived in a natural ecology where resources—soil, air, water, photosynthesis, climate—are matters of life and death. Culture and nature have entwined destinies, similar to (and related to) the way minds are inseparable from bodies. So ethics needs to be applied to the environment.

Bourdeau (2003) further stated that "Environmental ethics is that part of applied ethics which examines the moral basis of our responsibility toward the environment". K. Shrader-Frechette in (Yamin and Farhana, 1997) described that environmental ethics are concerned on obligation to recognizing primary, or strong, human rights: survival, health, welfare; obligation not to harm the environment; and recognition of secondary (weak) human needs. Ojomo (2011) also stated that environmental ethics is related to humans and the environment and it examines the moral basis of environmental responsibility.

The environmental ethics are created by humans to keep ecological balance. These ethics are related to the moral standard believed in certain society. Malays show particular attention to keep nature. Malay environmental ethics as collected in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* or Malay proverbs consists of advices, instructions, trustworthiness, teachings, and models delivered by Malays (Effendi, 2006: 7). It aims to bring people to right ways and blessed by God. In other words, it is used create a balance or equilibrium in human life. The content of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is the combination of Malay religious values, Malay cultural values and social norms in the Malay community. The position of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* is very important because its contents reflect noble Malay values used in everyday life.

This study aims to investigate environmental ethics in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*. The data are taken from *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* collected by Tenas Effendy, published by Balai Kajian dan Pengembangan Budaya Melayu and Adicita (2006). This study is conducted in the frame of descriptive and qualitative research.

## DISCUSSION

*Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* highlights environmental ethics. These ethics contain bans and references in utilizing nature and environment for human's needs. The great ideas found in these Malay proverbs signify the importance of keeping nature

347

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in Malay mind. Nature is viewed as the essential aspects of human life so that Malay possess local ingenious in utilizing nature.

#### a. Customs and nature

*Adat* or customs are sets of great values in Malay society. They are classified as the second level of values, where the highest level is religion. They are made to regulate relationship between people and others and between people and nature. In *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* the commitment to hold customs is signified by acts of saving nature as follows:

tanda orang memegang adat, alam dijaga, petuah diingat tanda ingat adat lembaga, laut dikungkung hutan dijaga	<i>the sign of people holding customs, nature is protected, wisdoms are remembered the sign to memorize customs, the sea is kept the forest is protected</i>
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These verses confirm that protection of nature is associated with holding Malay customs. It proves that keeping ecological balance is an essential part in Malay culture. Malay believed that humans may utilize nature to fulfil their needs but they must care for ecological balance. Humans are also suggested to remember Malay wisdoms in protection of nature because Malay mind concerns on the protection of nature. These verses also remind humans to keep the sea and protect forest since both natural resources provide needs of human. If people remember their own customs, they will keep the sea and forest since Malay customs have suggested guidances to utilize them. Therefore, the commitment to keep nature signifies the obedience of holding Malay customs .

The commitment of holding customs by protecting nature is also illustrated in following verses:

adat hidup memegang adat, tahu menjaga laut dan selat tahu menjaga rimba yang lebat tahu menjaga tanah wilayah tahu menjaga semut dan ulat tahu menjaga took dan belat	<i>the way of life holding customs, knowing to protect the seas and straits knowing to protect the dense forests knowing to protect the communal lands knowing to protect the ants and caterpillars knowing to protect the timbers and trees</i>
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People who hold customs are pointed to protect the natural resources such as the seas, straits, dense forests, communal lands, ants, caterpillars, timbers and trees. In traditional Malay society, these natural resources must be protected because those are source of life. The protection of the seas and straits signifies Malays' concern on protection of marine territories. As we know, Malay regions are located in marine territories so Malays have particular attention to the seas and straits. The protection of the dense forests indicate Malays' concern on saving the forests. Malays believed that forests provides many sources for human life. The protection of the communal lands indicates that Malay people possess particular lands. These lands does not belong to individual or corporate so that they are cultivated to fulfil the needs of community. The protection of the ants and caterpillars

indicates importance of protecting animals. Malays believe that animals are also created to fulfil need of humans so that human must protect them. The protection of the timbers and trees is related to the protection of dense forests because the timbers and trees are located in the forest territory. Humans may chop down them but human are obliged to keep them. As we know, the timbers and trees are worthwhile to keep ecological balance.

*Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* also suggests ethics of utilizing forests and lands. These ethics are also associated with customs, laws and norms.

tahu menebas memegang adat,	<i>knowing to chop (trees) holding customs,</i>
tahu menebang memegang amanat	<i>knowing to chop (trees) holding mandate</i>
tahu berladang menurut undang	<i>knowing to farm according to law</i>
tahun berkebun mengikuti kanun	<i>knowing to garden according to norms</i>

These verses suggest that humans must hold customs, laws and norms when they cultivate the forests and lands. All customs, laws and norms are established to keep ecological balance so that humans are banned to make over exploitation. They are allowed to chop down trees in the forest and utilized its land to farm and garden.

#### **b. Minds-Morals and nature**

*Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* suggests that mind plays important roles in protection of nature. Mind is used to consider how to protect nature effectively so that humans are able to find the best solutions to protect nature.

tanda orang berfikiran panjang,	<i>the sign of people who have a deep thought,</i>
terusak alam ia berpantang	<i>they do not destroy nature</i>
tanda orang berakal senonoh,	<i>the sign of people who have a right mind,</i>
menjaga alam hatinya kokoh	<i>protecting nature with a strong heart</i>

These verses indicate that if humans have a deep thought they will not harm nature because they knows that the forest damage causes disaster for humans. Therefore, humans are strongly suggested to protect nature seriously from their inner heart. The serious efforts should be done to save nature.

tanda orang berpikiran luas,	<i>the sign of people who have broad mind,</i>
memanfaatkan hutan ianya awas	<i>they use forest prudently</i>
apa tanda orang berilmu,	<i>the sign of people who have knowledge,</i>
memelihara alam ianya tahu	<i>they know how to protect nature</i>

By their mind, humans will consider so brodly that they are able to utilize forest prudently. Malays realize that the impropriety of utilizing of nature causes the ecological problems.

In *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*, the efforts of protection of nature are the combination between mind and morals. Mind is used to find the better strategies in protection of nature, while morals become the standard of “right or wrong” to keep nature.

tanda orang berbudi pekerti, merusak alam ia jauhi	<i>the sign of people who have a good moral, they do not destroy nature</i>
tanda orang berakal budi, merusak hutan ia tak sudi	<i>the sign of people who have a clear-headed, they do not want to destroy forest</i>

Morals are associated to certain cultural values believed in Malay society. People who have good morals avoid of harming nature since they realize that forest destructions are not accepted morally. The combination of mind and morals in the efforts of saving nature results serious movements so that nature will be protected properly.

### c. Sustainability and nature

Malays view that nature is utilized not only in the present time but also in the future time. Therefore, protection of nature will be advantageous for the next generation or descendants. It confirms the concept of sustainable protection of nature or continuous improvements of nature.

tanda ingat ke anak cucu, merusak hutan hatinya malu	<i>the sign of remembering descendants, they are embarrassed to destroy forests</i>
tanda ingat ke hari tua, laut dijaga bumi dipelihara	<i>the sign of remembering the old age the sea is protected the earth is</i>
<i>protected</i>	

These verses suggest that if people remember their descendants, they will be embarrassed to harm forests because the present people are responsible for saving nature. It means that if the present people love their children and grand children, they will leave protected nature for their future life.

The responsibilities for saving natural resources such as the seas and forests are also associated with the doomsday belief. This association indicates the strong responsibilities for saving nature for the next generation.

tanda ingat ke hari kemudian, taat menjaga laut dan hutan	<i>The sign of remembering doomsday Be obedient to protect the seas and forests</i>
tanda ingat ke masa datang, merusak alam ia berpantang	<i>The sign of remembering the future time harming nature is banned</i>

These verses implies that importance of leaving a good nature for the future. The only way to protect nature is banning to harm nature. The serious efforts to save nature will be beneficial for descendants.

#### d. Religion and Nature

In *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*, the efforts to save nature are also pointed to religious values. Malay believe in Islam as their primary identity.

tanda ingat kepada tuhan,	<i>the sign of remembering God</i>
menjaga alam ia utamakan	<i>maintaning nature is priority</i>
apa tanda hidup beriman,	<i>the sign for faith,</i>
tahu menjaga kampung halaman	<i>knowing to protect hometown</i>

These verses indicate that people who remember God concern on saving nature. Malays believe that nature is created to fulfil needs of human. Therefore, humans' actions to save nature are considered as a part of faith to God.

adat hidup orang beriman,	<i>the customs of faithful people</i>
tahu menjaga laut dan hutan	<i>knowing to preserve the seas and forests</i>
tahu menjaga kayu dan kayan	<i>knowing to preserve the trees and woods</i>
tahu menjaga binatang dan hutan	<i>knowing to keep the animals and forests</i>

The faithful people are again signified by the efforts to save the seas and foresst, trees, woods and animals. It affirms that Malays' concern on saving nature.

#### e. Benefits of Nature

Malays believe that people will live prosperously if they keep natural resources such as the seas, straits, land and forest. It is also believed that nature provides many benefits for human being.

kalau hidup hendak selamat,	<i>if you want get safe life,</i>
pelihara laut beserta selat	<i>saving the sea and straits</i>
pelihara tanah berhutan lebat	<i>saving the land with the dense forest</i>
di situ terkandung rezeki dan rahmat	<i>there contained sustenance and grace</i>
di situ terkandung tamsil ibarat	<i>there contained imageries</i>
di situ terkandung aneka nikmat	<i>there contained various graces</i>
di situ terkandung beragam manfaat	<i>there contained various benefits</i>
di situ terkandung petuah adat	<i>there contained admonished customs</i>

These verses imply that nature contain sustenance and grace. It means that humans gain many useful things from nature. It is also implied that nature cointains imageries and admonished customs as nature is a part of human life. People also get many good lessons from nature so that Malay think "the outspread nature becomes a teacher".

The next verses also justify the benefits of saving the natural resources such woods, plants, animals, rubbers, fruits and rattans. These resources are closely related to traditional life of Malays.

kalau terpelihara alam lingkungan,	<i>if nature is protected,</i>
ternyata manfaat banyak dirasakan	<i>it will provides many benefits</i>
ada kayu untuk beramu	<i>there are wood for gathering</i>

ada tumbuhan untuk ramuan	<i>there are plants for concoctions</i>
ada hewan untuk buruan	<i>there are animals for hunting</i>
ada getah membawa faedah	<i>there are rubber leading profits</i>
ada buah membawa berkah	<i>there are fruits leading gains</i>
ada rotan penambah penghasilan	<i>there are rattan adding incomes</i>

All the natural resources above are used to fulfil needs of human, such as wood for gathering, plants for concoctions, animals for hunting, rubber for profits, fruits for gains and rattan for adding more incomes.

#### f. Destruction of Nature

Protected nature make benefits for humans but the destroyed nature cause bad impacts. *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* also highlighted the bad sides of destroyed nature.

Apabila rusak alam sekitar,	<i>if nature is destroyed,</i>
Sempit tidak dapat berlegar	<i>narrow cannot hover</i>
Goyah tidak dapat bersandar	<i>wobby cannot lean</i>
Panas tidak dapat mengekas	<i>hot cannot work</i>
Hujan tidak dapat berjalan	<i>rainy cannot walk</i>
Teduh tidak dapat berkayuh	<i>shady cannot paddle</i>

Destroyed nature really causes ecological imbalance so natural system do not work properly. If it happens, nature do not provide good resources anymore. The above verses imply that nature is not friendly anymore with humans.

***Tunjuk Ajar Melayu justifies that the ecological imbalance causes many natural disasters. The natural disasters certainly make people misfortunes and suffering.***

Apabila rusak alam lingkungan,	<i>if nature is destroyed,</i>
Di situlah punca segala kemalangan	<i>it causes all misfortunes</i>
Musibah datang berganti-gantian	<i>disasters come alternately</i>
Celaka melanda tak berkesudahan	<i>unfortune comes endlessly</i>

The above verses implies that the disaster keeps happening and make people misfortune. This confirms the incredible impact of natural disaster for human life.

The destroyed nature cause not only natural disaster but also human disputes. Nowadays our nature has been destroyed so that we can see many disputes regarding to the use of natural resources.

Apabila alam porak poranda,	<i>if nature is destroyed,</i>
Di situlah tumbuh silang sengketa	<i>it causes many disputes</i>
Aib datang malu menimpa	<i>disgrace comes shame arises</i>
Anak cucu hidup merana	<i>descendants live miserably</i>

People fights to get lands and the fighting among people arises shame. The destroyed nature also cause suffering for descendants.

**g. Labelling Nature Destroyer**

Malays use negative expressions referring to people who destroy nature as *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* implied. The use of negative labels indicate that Malay people do not ***sympathize with the nature destroyers***.

No	Labelling	Translation
1	hati lebam	<i>livid heart</i>
2	hati hitam	<i>black heart</i>
3	hati setan	<i>evil heart</i>
4	hati serakah	<i>greedy heart</i>
5	buruk perangai	<i>bad temper</i>
6	seperti kerbau	<i>like a cow</i>
7	tak ingat hari kemudian	<i>not remember doomsday</i>
8	hati fasik	<i>wicked heart</i>
9	hati culas dan lancung	<i>deceitful and spurious heart</i>
10	hati sakit	<i>sick heart</i>
11	tidak beriman	<i>Impious</i>
12	seperti binatang	<i>like a animal</i>
13	berbuat makar	<i>causing treason</i>
14	hati berlumut akal menyeman	<i>mossy heart, mind spoiling</i>
16	perusak alam	<i>nature destroyer</i>
17	penjual hutan	<i>forest sellers</i>
18	pembabat hutan	<i>forest loggers</i>
19	serakah	<i>greedy man</i>
20	tak tahu malu	<i>Shameless</i>
21	kemaruk	<i>Ravenous</i>
22	tak hemat	<i>Improvident</i>

***The destroyers' heart are illustrated with bad heart and evil such as livid heart, black heart, evil heart, wicked heart sick heart, mossy heart and mind spoiling.*** This labelling justifies the bad actions of destroying nature. The bad actions are also illustrated with cows and animals. It shows Malays' anger toward nature destroyers. The bad characters of nature destroyers are illustrated as *bad temper, impious, not remember doomsday, shameless, ravenous and improvident*. Last, the forest destroyers also called as *forest sellers, forest loggers and greedy man*.

**CONCLUSION**

One of the solutions to solve the environmental problems is adopting the environmental ethics in society. We should utilize nature with codes of conduct based on the environmental ethics. *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* contributes the great environmental ethics that can be used to help saving nature and environment. The





principles of environmental ethics in *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* are based on customs, minds, morals, inheritance and religion. *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* also illustrate the benefits of saving nature and the bad impact of harming nature. These Malay environmental ethics are expected to solve environmental problems. These ethics are useful not only for Malays but also for other people.

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