

POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF ADAT PERPATIH

by Dato Prof. Dr. Zainal Kling.

1. Introduction

The theory and practice of **Adat Perpatih** both in Malaysia and Indonesia have received unabated scholarly attention since the coming of Europeans into this part of the world in the 16th century. Owing to imperialistic tendencies and motives, in the first instance, and later the need for scholarship, many of the studies were undertaken to comprehend the working and function of what seemed to be an exotic system whereby the women folk have a considerable impact on the life of the communities. Theories of origin were proposed to explain its existence within a largely male-dominated sultanate. In spite of the continuing interests, up to now, there have been no definitive and up-dated scientific studies and exposition of the entire system. Many of them are focussed on specific aspects in line with the personal interests of the scholars and researchers either in theory or comparative studies of institutions.

Another side of the situation has been the ethnocentric and prejudiced view and understanding expressed by members of communities outside the **Adat Perpatih** itself. Since much of our understanding of other socio-cultural systems has been coloured by our own cultural values, the systems of **Adat Perpatih** has always been viewed with a little misapprehension by the larger society. As a result, much of the popular understanding of the system is mere myth and fantasy, lacking appreciation of the fundamental principles governing the working of the real system.

Unfortunately, too, this situation has crept into the very personnel of the adat system that currently the germs of its own destruction can be said to have been implanted and germinated as evidenced by the failure of both the system and its personnel to resolve succession and other customary disputes in the manner previously dictated by the adat principles. The intrusion of other systemic alternatives and lack of '**verstehen**' of the very system itself has resulted in the contamination by personal and other interests within the system. Unending controversies in several situations regarding the administration and working of the system only illustrate the depth of the problems currently affecting the system as a viable entity within a larger national system.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to consider within the limited time and space available some of the principles which operate the system as a viable working social phenomenon. The paper will be

restricted to the political domain of the entire Adat. Other aspects would be taken up by papers presented in this seminar. The political structures and their functions, must be regarded with the utmost importance since much of the persistence and continuing validity of the Adat Perpatih seems to hinge on the operation of the political system.

To a casual observer, an '**adat**' is merely understood as customary practices, yet the **Adat Perpatih** had certainly demonstrated the comprehensiveness of its systematic constitutions and the viability of its institutional arrangements to be resilient in the face of other competing systems within the Malay society as a whole. It has shown functional compatibility and systemic validity for centuries within a changing environment which at times was quite hostile to its constitutions and existence. Nonetheless, so long as its very principle of action by consensus (**kuat adat kerana muafakat, hilang adat kerana muafakat**) is adhered to and preserved, the institutions and structures will persist and continue to provide the frame for actions in society.

2. Adat Ideologies

The existence and perpetuation of **adat** as a comprehensive socio-cultural system depended very much on the strength of its charter, as Malinowski would call it, the body of sayings and axioms as embodied in the '**terombo**' and '**pepatah**'. These are traditions originally transmitted orally as the bases of rules and regulations upon which deliberations were made and decisions executed. They constitute the charter of the system in which the legitimacy of actions is founded. The '**terombo**' provided the legendary (historical) basis of the foundation from the Minangkabau State of Sumatra. Many of the sayings are now recorded either by themselves in collections done by several compilers or as part of analyses of the various systems within the **adat**. Some of the more prominent studies are by Wilkinson, Winstedt, de Moubray, and the British administrators of Negeri Sembilan.

In so far as the political system is concerned the **Adat Perpatih** established the integration of two major principles:

- a. territoriality at the state and district levels,
- b. kinship groupings organised on matrilineal descent at the village level.

The **pepatah** formulated the following ideological conception of the entire society as follows:

<p>alam beraja luak berpenghulu</p>	<p>The world has a king, the luak has a penghulu</p>
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suku bertua	A suku has tua (elders)
anak buah beribu	a subordinate has leaders
bubapa orang	
semenda	an affine has a marital
bertempat semenda	place.

The '**alam**' is the largest of the physical unit, which territorially, is governed by a king. The subdivision of the state is the '**luak**' (district) is governed by a **Penghulu** (or **Undang** in another parlance). Below these territorial units are the villages which are not specified in territorial terms but that of kinship units, the '**suku**' headed by a **tua** (or **lembaga** in another parlance) and the general public which are normally divided into various family units are headed by a senior male member on the wife's side called '**ibubapa**' (or '**buapak**' in short). Since the general population is divided into twelve (12) named clans (**suku**) and each clan is generally an exogamous unit, the principle of exogamy, therefore, specifies the in-coming of male into each **suku**. Thus a **suku** is in fact a husband-receiving unit, a (**tempat semenda**) and a man always the marrying-in person (**orang semenda**), or the affine of the receiving unit.

In reality the construction of structural units from the State down to the general public is more complex. Geographical limitation, demographic expansion, inter-territorial migration and external migration play significant roles in the distribution and the formation of new social and territorial units. In historical times new villages must have been opened to cater for the expansion of population which must also have moved from one area to another. This kind of village fission resulted in the establishment of new kinship groups being located in other areas so that eventually there is no exact village identity for each of the named clan (**suku**). Family members migrated and established themselves in other villages through in-marriage, individual migration or in search of lands for cultivation. Today, each of the villages is in fact populated by a combination of a number of **suku** groups, each being the subdivision at various levels of partition.

Each **suku** is subdivided at various levels into the '**perut**' (womb) or major lineage, '**jurai**' or '**ruang**' (minor lineage) and the matrilineal family units (**keluarga**). At each level the actual kinship links could be traced and established. The deeper the level, the higher the level of grouping. Only at the **suku** and **perut** levels are the kinship linkages between members putatively established, the membership being already too large for real accounting. Nevertheless, the reality of such links is never questioned but in fact taken for granted as already sacredly established from a single ancestress in ancient times.

Upon this constitution of kinship structure, the entire society is founded and organised. The political organisation, therefore, pervades this kind of social construction. It is interesting to note, how-

ever, the pattern of leadership at every level of political organisation. While the State today is a real entity with its own legal constitution and various provisions for its administration, in theory it is non-existent and without a head. The **adat** theory seems to have stopped its political conception at the level of the **Luak** or District. Only at this level is a real chief or head provided for with real claim to the territory and powers. Over and above, the head, if any, is not invested with any claim to the territory except as symbol of 'justice' (**keadilan**) with the 'power' to 'behead with a sword' (**pedang pamancong**). Yet there seemed to be a king throughout the history of Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan to act as the central government for the federation of the several little 'negeri'. As the saying goes

adapun raja tiada mempunyai negeri,
dan tiada mencukai harajat,
melainkan berkeadilan sahaja,
serta pemakanan duit sesuku,
beras segantang nyior setali.

(The king has no state,
and does not tax,
Only as a symbol of justice,
he has a little food and money,
a little rice and coconut.)

The lack of real power, territory and means of support is only compensated by the symbolic position and power of justice. Perhaps it is this position as symbol that the king derives his real power over the people and the territorial chiefs. At the same time he is also not governed by the matrilineal **adat** of the ordinary people by his own patrilineal system. His succession, therefore is limited to among his own descendants, direct or lateral. But he derives his legitimacy through the election and installation by the ruling territorial chiefs, and therefore, the people who have made him a '**Yamtuan** or **Yang Dipertuan**' that is 'One who is made a Lord'. This is an interesting theory of social contract which is counteracted in all Malay States whereby at the installation of the **sultan** or **raja** he is bestowed a title of '**Sultan** and **Yang Dipertuan**'. He is a **sultan** by virtue of an Islamic belief or perhaps an Islamically-derived interpretation of the position of **sultan** in the political structure. But the Malay political theory, as recorded by the legend of the Sejarah Melayu, is one whereby the head of state is installed by the people with certain agreements: never to put a Malay subject to shame under any circumstance. The head of state is recognised as 'Supreme Chief' over others because he is the embodiment of justice. The king is the personification of Justice; only under this condition is he made Supreme Chief. The axiom often quoted is:

raja adil raja disembah
raja lalim (zalim) raja disanggah.
(a just king is obeyed
a cruel king is opposed.)

Justice is then the fundamental function of the political structure and organisation. Each level of the political structure is the point of judicial distribution whereby the dignitary is bestowed by the **adat** a specific limit of his judicial conduct and jurisdiction. As far as justice is concerned, it does not recognise blood ties, and everyone is equally treated in the eyes of the law:

biar mati anak, jangan mati adat,
(Let the child die, but not the law.)

This is further reaffirmed by the procedure:

tiba di batang, batang rebah
tiba di dahan, dahan patah
tiba di urat, urat lembang.

(At the trunk, the trunk falls
at the branch, the branch breaks
at the root, the root breaks.)

Nothing will obstruct justice wherever it is applied. To achieve this objective it is established that the political structure is constructed totally on the principle of differential judicial appeal, each level being higher than the other, climaxing at the apex where the king is. He is actually designated not as '**raja**' (king) but as 'justice' (**keadilan**). Below him is the territorial chief the '**undang**' (law), followed by the clan chief, the '**lembaga**' (institution), the lineage chief, the '**buapak**' (parents) and finally the family chief, the '**tua**' (elders). The entire political structure is symbolically constructed of judicial establishment, a legal constitution.

3. The Political Structure

The political structure seemed to be composed of a federation of territories, **Luak**, the federation being the jurisdiction of the '**keadilan**', or the **raja**. The history of Negeri Sembilan does not actually indicate a consistent number of territories federated under the 'nine states'. It varies from three to fourteen. Nevertheless, the current number of districts or **luak** are 14, namely: 1. Seri Menanti, 2. Ulu Muar, 3. Terachi, 4. Gunung Pasir, 5. Inas, 6. Jempol, 7. Johol, 8. Jelevu, 9. Sungai Ujung, 10. Rembau, 11. Tampin, 12. Linggi, 13. Gemenceh and 14. Air Kuning. Seri Menanti is the seat of the **Yamtuan**. His small territory is surrounded by two groups of four territories and each is headed by the **Undang** or **Penghulu**. The **Undang** and **Penghulu** are paired for purposes of critical rites of passage such as installation, paying obeisance, or death. The inner four surrounding Seri Menanti are grouped as the '**Tanah Mengandong**' which is the '**varenda**' of the outer four major **Luak** in relation to Seri Menanti. They are:

Inner Four	Outer Four
Luak Terachi	Luak Sungai Ujung
Luak Jempol	Luak Jelevu
Luak Gunung Pasir	Luak Rembau
Luak Ulu Muar	Johol

The other five districts are not traditionally included in ritual pattern and some are new creations: Tampin, Inas, Gemenceh and Air Kuning. The inner **luak** is headed each by a **Penghulu** and the outer ones each by an **Undang**, the **Undang** being senior to the **Penghulu**. Among the **Undang** the one in Sungai Ujung is the most senior in reference to the ritual of installing the **Yamtuan**, followed by Jelevu, Johol, Rembau, Ulu Muar, Jempol, Terachi, Gunung Pasir, Inas, Gemenceh, Air Kuning and Linggi. Tampin is on its own and Seri Menanti being the territory of the **Yamtuan** is not represented.

i. Yamtuan

The **Yamtuan Besar** (or **Yang Di Pertuan Besar**) has been the ruler of the federation since the late 18th century when a prince from Minangkabau was invited to be the king at Negeri Sembilan. Since then, generally, the ruler was chosen from among the male descendants but not necessarily of direct descent. The four major **Undang** have the right to elect from among eligible male issue to the 4th **Yamtuan** - **Yamtuan Radin** (1824-1861).

When a new **Yamtuan Besar** is to be installed, four **Lembaga** from Ulu Muar set out to inform the four major **Undang** who in turn are accompanied by their '**serambi**', the inner **Penghulu**. The four **Lembaga** are:

Datuk Paduka Besar (Ulu Muar) and Raja Di Muda (Terachi) for Sungai Ujung,
Orang Kaya Bungsu (Ulu Muar) and
Datuk Lela Raja (Jempol) for Jelevu.

Datuk Senara Muda (Ulu Muar) and Paduka Seri Maharaja (Gunung Pasir) for Rembau,
A Lembaga of Seri Menanti (Ulu Muar) and
Datuk Andika (Johol) for Johol.

The ceremony itself is very elaborate and involves the entire set-up of the palace and all the eight **Undang** and **Penghulu**. (cf. Sheehan, JMBRAS, Pt. 3, 1936 for a description of the installation of the YTB Tuanku Abdul Rahman, in 1936).

a. Since the **Yamtuan Besar** theoretically has no jurisdiction over the entire state, he, therefore has to be supported totally by all the **Luak**. As such he is provided with several officials of various functions and categories. The most senior would be the **Penghulu** and **Lembaga** of **Tanah Mengandong** who not only function as the chief of their own **Luak** and lineages but also as the officials of the palace whenever necessary. They pay their 'homage' to the **Yamtuan** once in 3 years.

b. Two other categories are the '**Air Kaki**' and '**Air Kaki Lengkongan**'. **Air Kaki** (lit. 'foot wash') is the affinal group supposedly the local non-royal sources of spouse for the **Yamtuan**. History has it that when the first **Yamtuan** (1773-1795) was invited, he was married off to

a local, non-royal spouse from the clan of Batu Hampar. The clan, therefore, claimed two senior palatial posts within the senior circle of officials called '**Orang Empat Istana** (Four Palace Officials): **Seri Amar Diraja** and **Raja Diwangsa**. The other two are appointed from the **Air Kaki Lengkonan**. This category is composed of the four clans of **Tanah Mengandong**: **Batu Hampar**, **Tanah Datar**, **Tiga Batu** and **Seri Lemak**. They are designated as **Penghulu Dagang** and **Penghulu Akhirzaman**. Another post, the **Menteri Maharaja** is reserved for the **Tanah Datar** clan. Other posts reserved for this category include two in the council of **Apit Lempang Orang Empat Istana**. With four other officials specifically reserved for the clans of **Seri Lemak Minangkabau**, **Seri Lemak Pahang**, **Seri Lemak Pahang Bukit Tempurong** and the **Batu Hampar**, they formed the council of **Orang Besar Lingkungan (Lingkungan : Chief)**. The **Lingkungan** group is, therefore, the private assistant to the palace provided by the State for the **Yamtuan**. In theory they are available for his utilisation for whatever purpose. The **Lingkungan** group interact closely with the royal group and may intermarry according to the patrilineal system. They are, however, organised in matrilineal clans and follow the **adat** as others.

c. **Putera Yang Empat** These are the royal dignitaries from among the royalty. Their function is to liaise with the other non-royal officials in relation to the **Yamtuan**. The **Yamtuan** makes the final decision after the **Putera Yang Empat** complete their investigation of any case brought before the **Yamtuan**. They liaise through the **Orang Empat Istana** who are the external link to the other officials outside the palace especially the senior **Undang** who must be accompanied by the **Orang Empat Istana** in any official dealing with or about the **Yamtuan**.

d. **Orang Empat Istana** The corresponding non-royal dignitaries of the palace specifically appointed from certain clans of the **Air Kaki** and **Air Kaki Lingkungan**. They are the privy officials dealing with succession of all levels of other officials including the **Undang**. They become the custodian of **adat**, ceremonies and rituals of the palace. They look after the affairs of the palace, including the members of royal household.

e. **Pegawai Yang Enam** These are the deputies to the **Orang Empat Istana** in the preparation for ceremonies, rituals, administration and other activities related to the palace. They compose of the **Panglima Sultan**, **Panglima Raja**, **Laksamana Satu**, **Laksamana Dua**, **Datuk Andatar** and **Datuk Johan**. Traditionally, they were the military aides to the king and liaise with the **Luak** on such matters.

f. **Apit Lempang Orang Empat Istana**

These are also the six assistants to the four major officials of the **Istana** in all matters as they deem fit. They are composed of the **Datuk Membesar**, **Datuk Andika**, **Datuk Sutan Bentara**, **Datuk Raja Panglima**, **Datuk Bentara Kanan** and **Datuk Bentara Kiri**.

g. **Pegawai 99** These are the junior officials who used to number 99 but are now enlarged to more than treble. They were the authorised officials to carry out the king's order and report back to the senior official of the palace through the **Apit Lempang**, the **Pegawai Enam** and the **Orang Empat Istana**. Nowadays, they make up the series of assistants in the palace ceremonies and are largely composed of the people of the **Tanah Mengandong**. Members of other clans are also appointed to this category.

The above categories of officials constitute the civil list of the king. They are, in theory, the people's support of the king as the seat of justice - the **keadilan**.

ii. **Undang**

The **Undang** are, in theory, the powerful territorial chiefs. They administer the traditional districts as supreme chief and have the power to 'kill':

Raja sekeadilan
Penghulu seundang
Tali pengikat pada Lembaga
Keris penyalang pada Undang
Pedang pamancong pada Keadilan.
 (The king is justice,
 the penghulu is lawful,
 the rope is to the Lembaga
 the keris is to the Undang
 the sword is to the Keadilan).

The jurisdiction of the **Undang** is more than that of his subordinate - the **Lembaga** and lesser than that of his superordinate, the **Keadilan** - the King. Nevertheless, it is the **Undang** who hold the critical function and power in the **adat** system. He is the '**junjungan**' -- the legitimate chief. He derived his power not from his own strength and valour but from the people. He is elected by the mandate of his people - the legitimate and rightful clans and sub-clans which were designated to supply and appoint the supreme chief of the **Luak** - (district.)

By virtue of historical antecedent all **Luak** would have a certain designated sub-clan of the major clan **Biduanda** to supply the **Undang**. They were supposedly the original migrants assimilated with the aboriginal inhabitants of the various districts of **Negeri Sembilan**. The designated sub-clan is known

as '**suku waris**' - the legitimate inheritor. The principle of succession is principally by way of '**giliran**' (taking turn). An **Undang** administers his **Luak** with the advice of his Council of Advisers -- the **Tiang Balai** which may vary in composition and sources from one **Luak** to another.

The **Luak Sungai Ujung** has two **Undang** taking turn one after the other. The senior member is the **Datuk Kelana Putra** of the Darat division and the **Datuk Syahbandar** of the Air division of the **Luak**. They are appointed by the representatives of the lineages - **perut** - **hilir** and **ulu** - and another official, failing which the **Lembaga Tiang Balai**, the Council of Advisers will make the selection.

The **Jelevu Undang** is known as **Datuk Mendika Menteri Akhirzaman**. He is elected from three **biduanda** sub-clans, taking turn in supplying the members to be elected - the **waris Ulu Jelevu**, **waris Kemin** and **waris Sarin**. The elected member of the designated **perut** or sub-clan has to be validated by the **Orang Delapan** - the Council of Eight advising the **Undang**. They determine the election procedure and the final outcome.

The **Undang Johol** is known as **Johan Pahlawan Lela Perkasa Setiawan**. The post is held in succession by two **biduanda** sub-clans of **Johol** and **Gemencheh**. A sub-clan holding the post **Undang** will automatically give way to the other when the time comes. The other sub-clan, therefore, automatically becomes the deputy **Undang** and known as **Baginda Tan Mas**. When the **Undang** dies it is this deputy post that is elected since the incumbent automatically assumes the **Undang** post.

In **Rembau** the **Undang** is elected from among two **biduanda baruh** sub-clans - the **Jakun** and the **Jawa**. The **Undang of biduanda Jakun** is known as **Datuk Maharaja Lela** and the **Undang of biduanda Jawa** is known as **Datuk Sedia Raja**. The candidates for each sub-clan would normally go through a series of shortlisting at the levels of sub-clan, Council of **Lembaga** and the **Tiang Balai**. The **Tiang Balai** is the final authority in the selection.

The council of advisers, variously designated as the **Tiang Balai**, **Orang Delapan** or heads of sub-clans form the consultative council for each **Undang** to decide on matters pertaining to **adat**. He cannot make any decision without such consultation. There are of course, other means and committees which must be referred to before a case is finally decided.

iii. Penghulu

The **Penghulu** are the traditional chiefs of the other **Luak**. They are similarly elected in turn from among the legitimate sub-clans of the **biduanda** clan except in **Terachi** from the **Seri Lemak Pahang** and **Gunung Pasir** from the **Tanah Datar**.

The designations of **Penghulu** are as follows:

Ulu Muar is known as **Datuk Setia Maharaja Lela Pahlawan**,

Jempol is known as **Datuk Lela Pahlawan**,

Gunung Pasir is known as **Datuk Setiawan**,
Inas is known as **Datuk Johan Pahlawan Lela Perkasa**,

Gemencheh is known as **Datuk Orangkaya Setiawan**,

Ayer Kuning is known as **Datuk Orangkaya Setiawan**.

iv. Lembaga

This post is by far the most important within the clan system. He is the chief of clan and supposedly the founder of the clan within the area. He is in turn elected by the lower chiefs as a kind of promotion for the senior ones. There is, therefore, a convection of power from the people variously grouped into clans and sub-clans. The people themselves elected their officials to become the chief of sub-clans and these chiefs of sub-clans later elected from among themselves the chief of clans. The principle of election is normally '**kebulatan**' - consensus of members. As differences may occur, this is decided by way of consultation -- **muafakat**.

The named clans in **Negeri Sembilan** are
1. **Biduanda**, 2. **Batu Hampar**, 3. **Tanah Datar**, 4. **Tiga Batu**, 5. **Seri Lemak**, 6. **Seri Melenggang**, 7. **Paya Kumbuh**, 8. **Mungkal**, 9. **Batu Belang**, 10. **Amnak Acheh**, 11. **Tiga Nenek** and 12. **Anak Melaka**. Theoretically speaking each **suku** would have its one **Lembaga** or chief and each **Luak** would have only four **suku**. This is not the case since demographic expansion, migration and intermarriages have dispersed population into several areas. Thus, each **Luak** and **mukim** or village would have several **suku** sub-clans mixed together so that not only are there several sub-clan heads, the **buapak**, but also several **Lembaga** for each **suku** in one district.

The jurisdiction of the **Lembaga** is limited within his clan only. Since there is no territorial area for a clan the **Lembaga**, therefore, has to operate within the same village as may other **Lembaga**. Nonetheless, he knows his clan group and normally is assisted by the chiefs of his sub-clans - the **Buapak**.

v. Buapak

The **buapak** is the chief of the sub-clan the **perut**, which had for years established itself in a village which now has become part of its name. For each clan or **suku** there would be as many sub-clans as the pattern of outward migration would allow. Members of each subclan would elect a senior male member as the chief with a title. He holds office, like other chiefs, for life unless, of course, his title and

rectly to the **Lembaga** and are solely responsible to the **Lembaga** even though their position is lower than the **Buapak's**. The **Orang Besar** of both categories function as the 'eye' of their respective chief and provide the direct feedback on the affairs of the **suku** or **perut** as well as the population at large

vii. Tua

At the family level the eldest male on the mother's side – the maternal uncle – be-

Bahagian	Suku	Gelaran Lembaga	Perut	Gelaran Buapak
Baruh	Batu Hampar	Datuk Gempa Maharaja	1. Penajis	Raja Mengkuta, Raja Mentika, Panglima Sutan
			2. Penajis Hilir	
Baruh	Paya Kumbuh	Datuk Merbangsa	1. Legong 2. Bongek	Raja Ganti
Darat	Seri Melenggang	Datuk Mendalika	1. Batu Hampar	Gegal
			2. Chuai	Maharaja Jekanda
			3. Terentang	Jelela
			4. Chembong	Jelela

position are taken away by the **Lembaga** by virtue of his infraction of the **adat** laws. His is the real representative of the people who are already grouped into various sub-clans. This is the lowest unit within the named clans and the chief carries a title such as the case in Rembau:

The above does not constitute the full list of **suku**, **perut** or titles assigned to each of the **perut**. It indicates the kind of title and level of fission for a **suku**. The **Buapak** of a **perut** operates within his social jurisdiction especially concerning family laws of the **adat** such as marriage, divorce, division of property and other small conflict within the **perut**. Appeal on his decision is brought to the **Lembaga**.

vi. Orang Besar

There are two categories of the **Orang Besar** the **Orang Besar Undang** who are the officials of the **Undang's** office which normally comprises four posts. The other category is the **Orang Besar Lembaga** who are in fact the chiefs elected from among senior members of the family to assist the **Lembaga** in the administration of the **suku**. There seems to be no fixed number and they serve for life unless terminated by the **Lembaga**. They report di-

comes the head of a family in any occasion and situation especially in ritual matters. While the father has the responsibility to provide and work for the family especially to utilise the wife's land for cultivation, the **tua** would always be consulted on matters affecting the individual family unit. In matters of ritual the **buapak** would be responsible in its execution but the **tua** and the father would ensure that everything necessary for the execution of the ritual would be made ready. The **tua** as the mother's brother is in a position to be candidate for a post in the **perut** and **suku** if his **perut** is the designated one for such position.

vii. Anak Buah

The people at large, the general population, are the total **anak buah** of all levels and categories of chiefs. They are divided into various **suku** and **perut** for **adat** administration. As member of a **suku** or **perut** they are the **anak buah** of chiefs, but among themselves they are 'waris' to each other of the same **suku**. They regard each other as members of the same large family. They play the role of voters at the lowest level of leadership from which further election may take place. To

that extent, there is an upward convection of power from the public below. To this extent too with the idea of the power of the people, democracy can be said to exist. But this is not the popular kind of democracy where each and everyone has similar and equal status in voting. This is more like the party system where members have the voting power. But since there is no one-party system but of multi-parties all the people would, in the final analysis, have some form of voting right in the political system. To this extent, therefore, there is popular democracy within the traditional **adat** system as opposed to the top-down process of political leadership in the more absolute monarchical system. The **anak buah** in the **adat perpatih** system is more responsible for his fate and that of society than the other more centralised system.

4. Conclusion

The **adat perpatih** has demonstrated a great deal of viability and validity in the face of strong competition from other systems be it in political, social, economic and religious functions. It has been able to be very resilient in coping with changes largely by virtue of its 'popular' base in the people. However, this is only possible if the **adat** system functions as the popular system of the people to fulfil every need in society. A functioning system implies full knowledge of the **adat** — its sayings, operations, electoral processes, bases of leadership and above all the infractions which would have taken place to threaten the existence of the **adat** system. For as long as knowledge of the **adat** is popular — existing as common knowledge of the population at large — then the **adat** system would continue to exist as a functioning framework of action and activities. This cognitive aspect is the key in the continued functioning of the system. Once the knowledge is lost, then there is already a beginning of the end.

It is significant that the **adat** has placed so much emphasis on the role and position of women and yet the women are not the ones who defend the **adat**. Perhaps, the liberating aspect of the **adat** is not fully and properly appreciated by the members themselves and others outside. The **adat** becomes the victim of 'scapegoating' in any social malaise. Perhaps, it is quite timely for this rediscovery.



**Biodata
Of
Writer**

DATO' PROF. DR. ZAINAL KLING

Born in 1944, he graduated with a B.A. (Hons) and an M.A. from the University of Malaya and Ph. D from the University of Hull, U.K. He has undertaken research on Penghulu Naning and Kinship System in Naning, Villages in Sarawak, Sabab and Ulu Terengganu, National Culture and National Unity, Adat in Malay Society and other areas of interest. He was awarded a Datoship by His Excellency, the Governor of Malacca in 1988. He has lectured and held several positions in the University of Malaya and is currently Head of the Dept. of Anthropology and Sociology.