

This carefully curated collection of folktales from all over Malaysia brings together 12 legendary stories which have etched themselves into the collective memory of the people.

Elegant palaces, humble village houses, lush rice fields and verdant rainforests form the backdrops for the characters' search for truths, reversal of fortunes, sacrifices for the greater good, heartbreak, loss and the quest for love.

In a world pervaded by magic, the heroes and heroines undertake journeys of personal growth, calling on the powers of love, memory, resilience, courage and wisdom to overcome the greatest odds.

Told in vivid detail and lavishly illustrated, these timeless tales will linger in the imagination long after the last page.

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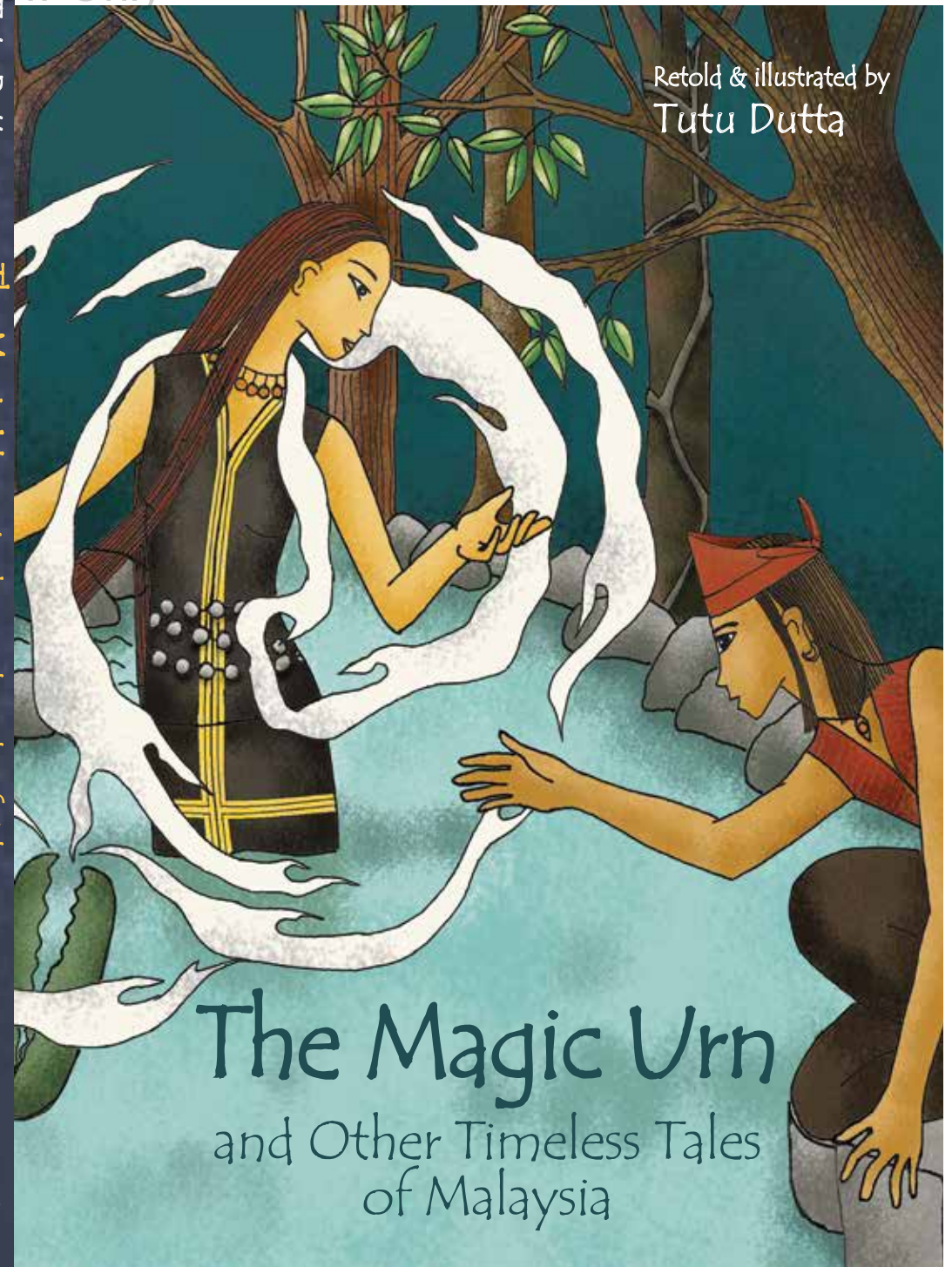


Tutu Dutta

The Magic Urn and Other Timeless Tales of Malaysia

Marshall Cavendish Editions

Retold & illustrated by  
Tutu Dutta



# The Magic Urn

and Other Timeless Tales of Malaysia

For Review Only



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**Marshall Cavendish**  
Editions

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For Shona and Yean,  
and my parents too





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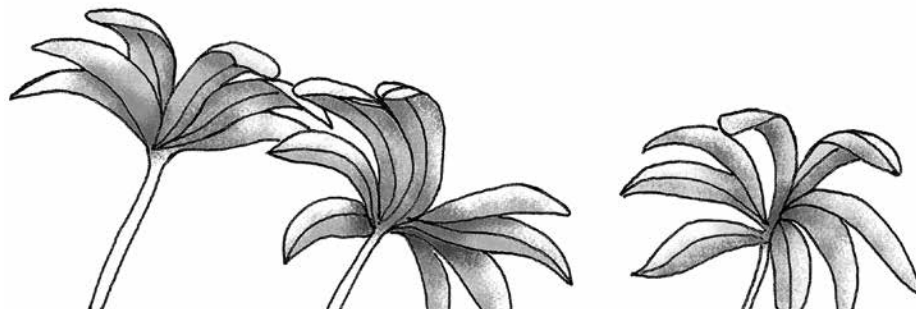
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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE



Ever since I was a child I've always been interested in old stories. Stories from the people and retold by storytellers, the Malay *panglipur lara*, from village to village... in short, I was a collector of folktales. And the Malay archipelago, being on the Spice Route between India and the Arab world to the West, and China to the East had an especially rich folklore tradition. Of course, a summer spent at Sophia University, Tokyo taught me that folktales could be high literature.

As I grew older, I realised that these stories were fading away; people were beginning to forget them. It's important not to forget our own stories because we don't want to end up with only *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* to tell our children. So I started researching folktales in different variations.

The more stories I collected, the more I saw similar stories all over the world. For example, a story called the *Weavermaid and the Herdsboy* from China is known as *The Fisherman and the Swan Maiden* in Japan and is also found in Malaysia as *Endu Dara's Legacy*. We have our own version of *The Goose Girl* in *Princess Trailing Hair-knot*, a princess who becomes a bird-chaser in the royal rice fields; and of *Beauty and the Beast*, in *The Unnamed Princess*. This story also has elements from *The Sleeping Beauty*. However, a few such as *The Magic Urn*, *The Faerie Who Wept Flowers* and *The Winter Melon Maiden*

seemed uniquely homegrown.

I started writing children's fiction in 2003 while living in New York. Because of my lifelong interest in folklore and children's literature, it seemed logical to start by researching and re-telling a collection of Asian folktales. Not surprisingly, the manuscript was ignored by New York publishers. So I got together with a group of people and the result was *Twelve Treasures of the East*, (self) published in 2005. The book was co-authored by Lucy Bedoya Maire, a folklore enthusiast from Peru and illustrated by a talented young artist from New York, James Konatich.

The book was in a storybook format with almost 20,000 words, interspersed with illustrations. It was launched by the Datin Amy Hamidon, wife of the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the UN, New York.

Back in Malaysia, I pitched Marshall Cavendish and MPH Publishing with the idea of an Asian folktales storybook in 2006/2007. Meanwhile, I came up with a number of black and white illustrations to strengthen my submission.

In 2008, to my surprise and delight, Marshall Cavendish commissioned an all-Malaysian folktale book. After eight months of hard work, *Timeless Tales of Malaysia* was published in 2009. The illustrations were hand drawn but coloured by a DTP artist.

I'm delighted that my very first traditionally published book, *Timeless Tales of Malaysia*, has a new lease of life as *The Magic Urn and Other Timeless Tales of Malaysia*.



## Princess Trailing Hair-knot

### *Puteri Sanggul Berjurai*

A Folktale from Perlis



**O**NCE upon a time, two young princesses lost everything they had in the world. Misfortune struck when their parents passed away unexpectedly. And even while they were still mourning, greedy and ruthless relatives had seized the throne.

Fortunately, the two princesses managed to escape the palace unscathed. With the help of an old palace handmaiden, they fled to a little cottage hidden at the edge of the forest. The two princesses stayed in the cottage for many months. They led an impoverished life, far removed from the riches and luxury they were accustomed to. They had to learn many new skills to survive, but they managed to cope with the help of the old handmaiden.

Eventually, the beautiful elder sister married a court official who used to serve her father. She tried to persuade her younger sister to come and live with her, but she refused the offer. The young princess was sad to be apart from her sister, but she loved

her carefree life at the edge of the forest too much to give it up.

Now alone with the old handmaiden, the princess was given to recollecting her old life in the palace. Her name was Puteri Nang Chayang, but no one called her by her real name. The other ladies of the court had called her Sanggul Berjurai, because she used to walk around the palace gardens with her *sanggul* or hair-knot unravelled, her long hair trailing behind her. All the other court ladies wore their hair skilfully knotted and held in place with jewelled pins; her elder sister even had the neatest *sanggul* or hair-knot of them all!

The court ladies had considered Sanggul Berjurai unladylike due to her untamed hair and her love of nature. She became tanned from long hours spent outdoors, and she heard the ladies whispering that this made her more unattractive than she already was.

But despite her appearance, Puteri Sanggul was neither ignorant nor foolish. She was, in fact, well-versed in the rituals and language of the court, but she was not ready for such a stifling life just yet. The princess was fiercely independent, and felt she didn't need anyone to teach her anything that she did not know already.

As the months passed in the little cottage, Puteri Sanggul grew into a tall and slender young woman. More amazingly, her hair had grown so long that it reached her ankles! The old handmaiden helped her to comb her hair and taught her how to knot it properly. Puteri Sanggul wondered what name the court ladies would give her if they saw her now!

“My lady,” said the old handmaiden, “they only called you Sanggul Berjurai because they were secretly jealous of your hair! In all of my years I have never seen another woman with hair like yours.”

The princess was pleased by the old lady’s words. She had never imagined that there was anything about her that could incite envy in others. But the old handmaiden warned her, “Heed my words, my lady! Now that you are a young woman, always conceal your hair from the gaze of strangers!” The old handmaiden died a few months later, leaving Puteri Sanggul Berjurai truly alone for the first time in her life.

One day, the princess discovered some ripe mangoes, a basket filled with rice and venison wrapped in a banana leaf left on the steps to her cottage. The princess was delighted; she had not eaten rice or meat for a long time, and naturally assumed her sister had left the food there for her.

However, the next day, a strange man armed with a hunting knife suddenly appeared on her doorstep. The man spoke to her roughly, “Princess, you have taken the offerings I left here, now you have to pay for them!”

Princess Sanggul Berjurai was alarmed. The man looked menacingly strong, and she sensed that he had evil intentions towards her. She had unwittingly fallen into his trap by eating the food, and she was now beholden to him. But she did not lose her head and panic. Instead she said calmly, “So it was you who so kindly left the food there for me! And what can I do to



return your favour, kind sir?"

"Princess, you are too dark and tall to be attractive," the man said, "but when I saw you walking alone in the forest with your hair unbound, I decided to take you for my wife."

The princess was stunned. After a pause, she replied quietly, "You know that I am a princess of the blood. The custom of this land forbids me from marrying a commoner!"

The man sneered, "Ha! There are no such customs in my land! You have taken my gifts so you must repay me! You will accompany me to my home upstream!"

The princess knew that the man could hold her captive in the cottage for days, so she decided to play along for the time being. She said primly, "Well, if you expect me to follow you home, you must wait outside while I comb my hair and pack some of my things." She then rushed indoors and wrapped a long strip of cloth around her head, to make sure that her *sanggul* would not unravel anymore and packed all her belongings in a bundle.

The princess followed the man towards the bank of the stream and noticed his small *sampan* tied to a tree. She let out a cry of alarm, "I can't swim and I've never been in a *sampan* before! What if I fall into the stream?"

Annoyed, the man pulled the boat to shore and shoved the princess into it. Then he untied the *sampan* and pushed it out into deeper waters. The seemingly helpless princess quickly grabbed hold of the oars and rowed the *sampan* away! The man rushed forward and tried to grab hold of the *sampan*, but the

princess was too strong; she rowed the boat into the distance, leaving the man standing on the bank, cursing in fury.

The princess was relieved to be free of the beastly man, but the sad realisation that she could never return to her little cottage again dawned on her. For a few days the princess drifted down the river, unsure of where she was heading. Then she suddenly saw a young girl wearing rags and with long dishevelled hair standing by the river bank, waving frantically. The princess rowed towards her.

"Who are you, girl?"

"I am Paku Mayang, my lady. Please help me, I'm all alone!"

Princess Sanggul Berjurai felt sorry for the poor girl and replied, "You are welcome to share this *sampan*, Paku Mayang! We can take turns to row!"

The two girls took turns to row the *sampan* and drifted further and further downstream. Paku Mayang told the princess about herself, "I ran away from my village because my relatives were trying to force me to marry a rich old man just after my father passed away!"

The princess sympathised with Paku Mayang's predicament after her own narrow escape from the rough huntsman, and told the girl her own sad story. But the princess did not tell Paku Mayang her real name.

As it was a hot day, the princess rowed to the shallows and tied the *sampan* to a tree. Puteri Sanggul Berjurai decided to bathe in the river and wash her hair and Paku Mayang followed suit. After the bath, they dried themselves and the princess







allowed the poor girl to borrow some of her fine clothes. Paku Mayang also managed to persuade the princess to lend her a jewelled hairpin to hold her hair-knot in place.

Meanwhile, the crown prince of a neighbouring kingdom had a strange dream: a young maiden with extraordinary raven black hair was approaching his palace in a small *sampan*. The maiden was a true princess of the blood; she was not only beautiful but also wise and kind-hearted, and she was destined to be his wife. The dream came to him again and again, which finally urged him to send his palace guards to keep a lookout along the river for a maiden with unusually long hair.

After several days, the guards spotted the *sampan* carrying Puteri Sanggul Berjurai and Paku Mayang approaching. The men escorted the two maidens to the prince's splendid royal palace retreat. The prince was surprised to be presented with two maidens instead of one. He assumed that one must be the princess and the other her maid. He was drawn to the more flamboyant Paku Mayang, who dazzled him in her borrowed fineries. He also noticed the jewelled pin holding up her long hair, and felt sure that she was the princess of his dreams. He did not give the unassuming tall and slender maiden with the head wrap a second glance.

“What is your name, my lady?”

“I am called Puteri Paku Mayang, my lord! I was forced to flee my land because my parents passed away and cruel relatives seized the throne!”

Puteri Sanggul Berjurai was mortified to hear her life

story stolen and retold by Paku Mayang! But the princess was too hurt and upset to say anything, and just held her tongue. Unfortunately, the prince actually believed Paku Mayang's lies and married her. Sanggul Berjurai was sent out of the palace to work in the fields. She lamented sadly, “It seems that I am cheated by fate once again.”

The poor princess had to work as a bird-chaser in the prince's orchard. The other farmers found the tall, slender woman a little strange and melancholy, but respected her all the same for her kindness.

Meanwhile, the prince found his new wife to be oddly ignorant of court rituals and totally lacking in refinement; she was also greedy and given to using foul language! Even worse, she treated her handmaidens and the other court ladies with contempt and disdain.

The prince began to believe that he had made a terrible mistake. Surely this was not the princess he had dreamt about! When the prince decided to return to the grand palace, he went alone; he did not want to take Paku Mayang with him to the grand palace to be presented to the king and queen. Furious at being left behind, Paku Mayang began to ill-treat the handmaidens even more.

As he sat brooding over his fate, the prince suddenly recalled the other maiden who arrived in the same *sampan*—the one he had dismissed as a mere servant girl! Was *she* the true princess he was meant to marry? But where was this maiden to be found?





The prince rode his steed furiously back to his summer palace, and searched for the mysterious maiden among the servants, but he could not find her anywhere.

One day, the prince went for a ride in his orchard alone, to reflect on the miserable turn his life had taken. Then at a distance, he spotted a tall maiden with a familiar head wrap! The prince dismounted his horse and approached her surreptitiously. He hid behind a tree to spy on her.

Sanggul Berjurai sighed. It was a hot day, and she was tired after chasing birds away. And her head wrap made her feel even more uncomfortable. After making sure she was alone, she pulled off her head wrap, and her long raven-black hair uncoiled and tumbled down her back; it shone like a river of black silk in the sunlight.

The prince gasped in amazement. There was no doubt that this bird-chaser was the princess of his dreams! Sanggul Berjurai heard him and spun around. Realising that a stranger was spying on her, she fled in fear. The prince gave chase and caught her by her hand.

“Don’t flee from me, my lady! It is I, Putera Samura! I mean you no harm!”

Sanggul Berjurai knelt and stammered. “M-my Lord! I did not see you approaching!”

The prince was silent for a long moment. He was chagrined because he had married an impostor, while the real princess had been made to work his fields as a bird-chaser.

When he finally found his tongue, he asked her, “Why didn’t

you tell me that you were the real princess on that day at the palace?”

“I was afraid that you would not believe me, my lord!”

She was right; he had been too easily taken in by appearances. Then he helped her up to her feet and took her sunburnt hands in his. Puteri Nang Chayang followed the prince back to the palace and told him everything that had befallen her since that fateful day her parents passed away. The prince was furious. “I’ll have that ungrateful and shameless impostor flogged in public!”

“My lord, we are all at fault here,” Puteri Nang Chayang reminded him. “Paku Mayang, for her deceit; you yourself, my lord, for judging someone based solely on their appearance; and I most of all, for not having the courage to speak up!”

The prince realised that Puteri Nang Chayang truly had wisdom and a kind heart, just as she did in his dreams. In a show of mercy, the prince had Paku Mayang exiled from the country instead. She was given a *sampan* stocked with provisions and was sent back upstream. And as for Puteri Nang Chayang, she married the prince and they lived happily ever after.