

NARRATIVES OF WAR: ACEHNESE PERCEPTION OF THE *PRANG KAPHE* IN 19TH/20TH CENTURY COLONIAL ERA

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Abstract

The so-called narratives of war refer to *hikayat* literature composed especially during the Dutch occupation of Aceh in 19th century and early 20th century; they relate mostly battles and exploits of the Acehnese heroes and fighters against the Dutch incursion, beginning in 1873. Since war fought against the Dutch was considered as a *jihād* war, these *hikayats* then came to be known as the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* (or the story of the war in the path of God) or *Hikayat Prang Kaphe* (or war against the infidels). Besides their cultural and historical significance, these *hikayats* are also reliable documents to understand the Acehnese perception of the *jihād* war or the *prang kaphe*. This essay then is an attempt to study these *hikayats* as sources in reading the Acehnese perception of *jihād*. To facilitate analysis, three war *hikayats* viz. the *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali* and *Hikayat Prang Rundeng* will be chosen as focus of critical study. From the analysis the essay comes to an interesting conclusion: that contrary to popular belief, the *jihād* war did not have a similar grip on every Acehnese; apparently there were varied responds and emotions towards the war which influence Acehnese perception towards the whole ideology of *jihād*.

Keywords: narrative of war, *Hikayat Prang Kaphe*, Acehness perception, *jihād*

INTRODUCTION

The narratives of war or more popularly known among the Acehnese as the *hikayat prang* (Ibrahim Alfian, 1983), refer to works of literature (rendered in

the Acehese verse form called *sanjak*, re: Noriah Taslim, 2010) composed especially during the period of Dutch occupation in Aceh during 19th and early 20th century. The *hikayat prang*, unlike other forms of Acehese *hikayat* (the epic *hikayat* and the fictional romance) are factual narratives, mostly relating battles and exploits of Acehese heroes/fighters against the Dutch incursion in Aceh, beginning in 1873; or otherwise religious sermons/*khutbah* instigating war against the Dutch. Since war fought against the Dutch was considered as a *jihād* war, thus these *hikayats* came to be known as the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* (literally “the story of the war in the path of God”) or the *prang kaphe* (war against the infidel).

This definition underlies the religious connotations of *hikayat prang*, and true to its nature, these *hikayats* are saturated with Islamic religious zeal – (prevailing since the days of Prophet Muhammad) the so-called the spirit of *jihād* (the holy war against the infidels). In Aceh, the earliest display of the spirit of *jihād* was probably seen during the reign of Iskandar Muda (1607-1636), the Acehese monarch who went down in history as the most aggressive Islamic conqueror/propagator of Islam in the area. His prowess against the Portuguese (in Melaka) based on his grand ideology of *prang kaphe*, was well celebrated in the famous epic *Hikayat Meukuta Alam*.

Apparently, the *jihād* spirit once again manifested itself, perhaps more widespread and intense during the period and after the Dutch invasion of Aceh in 1873. They were numerous reports of clashes between the Acehese and the Dutch throughout the Dutch era (probably until early 20th Century). In line with the emerging *jihād* spirit, the text *Hikayat Prang Sabi* was duely written with the intent to cast the war against the Dutch as a religious cause and to plead and incite all the Acehese Muslims to take up arms in support of it. And as proven later on these *hikayats*, in all respects, accomplish these objectives.

THE EMERGENCE OF *HIKAYAT PRANG SABI*

Aceh’s defeat in 1873, did nothing to settle the antagonism of the Acehese against the Dutch. The struggle continued with the Acehese taking up arms and shelters in the mountains (Gunung Seulawah) and regrouping themselves into guerilla fighters; the subsequent armed resistance came to be known as *prang kaphe* (war against the infidels) and perceived as a defensive act against the Dutch.

However, after years of struggle and hardship in the mountains, the Acehese spirit gradually waned and most returned to assume normal life. It was then that the Sultan (Sultan Alaidin Mahmud Syah) issued a *sarakata* (decree) calling the *ulama* to infuse the spirit of *jihād* into the hearts of the Acehese by writing the *hikayat* on *jihād* (subsequently known as the *Hikayat Prang Sabi*); the decree reads (translated by Nurainy Ali, 1995:189):

Oh you pious gentlemen; preach the teachings of Islam to the people by composing “stories of the holy war” to inspire them, so that they look forward to face death in the holy war to protect their Islamic faith, the religion that was brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the country the sultanate and the people.

The royal command received tremendous responds from the *ulama* (“pious gentlemen” above). *Hikayat* and *khutbah* on *Prang Sabi* surfaced from all corners of Aceh; these were multiplied into hundreds of copies and available in many versions (Nurainy Ali, 1995 and Ibrahim Alfian, 1987). They were kept, recited and read at almost every home and *madrasah*; some were even found attached/tied to the bodies of fighters as *tangkal*/talisman. The texts touched and overwhelmed almost every Acehese heart. The *khutbah* especially stirred intense religious fervour as never before; more importantly it inspired and compelled them to fight in the holy war—thus fighting spirit was restored, and violence and hatred towards the Dutch, revived. Soon the Acehese were back in the jungles and mountains; planning ambush, running amok and launching surprise attacks on the Dutch (as well as any European, see Reid, 1995; incidences of such attacks were reported in Dutch sources as well as testified later by *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali*). The period of slaughter was known by the Dutch as the *Atjeh Moorden* (the Aceh murder).

These so-called war narratives or the *Hikayat Prang* were of two kinds – the more popular ones were the *khutbah* type – these were basically rhetorics of war; they exhort *jihād* through persuasive techniques, relying heavily on the verses from Quran and *jihād* stories from tradition; they instilled fear through punishment of hell and excite passion through rewards of heaven and heavenly nymps (especially enticing was the nymph Ainul Mardhiah). These were the so-called *Hikayat Prang Sabi*.

The second *hikayat*, inspired *jihād* through stories of heroic battles of past Aceh warriors; celebrating their courage, deeds and sacrifices in the *jihād* against the *kafir* (Dutch and those in alliance with them) and ultimately, their honorable death as *syuhada*/martyrs. These are actual battle *hikayat*—such

as *Hikayat Prang Geumpani* and *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali*; *Hikayat Prang Rundeng* (*Hikayat Teungku di Meuka*).

To the Dutch these were subversive literature, or resistance literature. Thus they were confiscated and burned. To the *ulamas*/religious leaders then, these were texts of *mantera*, magical words, powerful rhetorics that enchanted and hypnotised the youth to perform *jihad* without fear or reservation. To the *jihad* fighters and the *uleebalang*, these texts were held as testaments of the rewards that await the *syuhada* – painless death, the cleansing of all sins and the pleasures of *jannah*; some even believed that these texts endowed them with invulnerability, or *kebal* thus they were attached to their bodies before going to war (texts of *Hikayat Prang Sabil* were actually found on bodies of *jihad* fighters – see Ibrahim Alfian, 1987 and Nurainy Ali, 1995).

Besides their cultural and historical significance, these texts are also reliable documents to understand the Acehnese perception of the *jihad* or the *prang kaphe*. This essay now shall attempt to study these texts as sources in reading the Acehnese perception of *jihad*. The corpus for the study are the *Hikayat Prang Sabil* (texts edited and translated by Nurainy Ali, 1995), the *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali* or the *Prang Kandang* (texts edited and translated by Nurainy Ali, 1995) and *Hikayat Prang Rundeng* or *Hikayat Teungku di Meuka* (texts edited and translated by Drewes, 1980).

ACEHNESE PERCEPTION OF PRANG KAPHE: THE HIKAYAT PRANG SABI

Hikayat Prang Sabil in essence contained the call and plea for *jihad*; in a manner of a *khutbah*, it expounded the benefits of *jihad* and the deceptions of all worldly attractions. Underpinning the *khutbah* were the principle of *jihad*s spelled out in the third royal decree (*Sarakata Pernyataan Perang* dated 21 March, 1877, Nurainy Ali, 1995:19-20):

...that it is compulsory for all to fight the Dutch and that there are only two things to remember, not three. First is to win the war...secondly is to die martyred. There is no third, that is to surrender to the Dutch, our enemy and the ancestral enemy of our children and grandchildren...

These principles of *jihad* were reiterated in the *khutbah*, validated with the Qur'anic verses and expanded with stories of *qias* and examples. Through the length of the narrative, the author's (most are anonymous *ulamas*) perception and conception of the *jihad* war were apparent. The fact that the

war was a defensive act against the aggression of the Dutch infidels were clearly defined in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, thus the central appeal enunciated in the text was for the preservation of Islam (thus also Aceh – the *raja*, land and people) against this threat.

In this context, the Dutch was seen not only as a threat to religion but also as the source of all Aceh's ailments – chaos in the land, the displacement of the ruler and people (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:170), and economic hardship; I quote a few lines as illustration :

All the districts have been scattered asunder/the work of the jealous
stupid dutch

(*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:170)

They insult our religion...they fight and torture us and insult our Prophet
(*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:185)

All the rulers have been separated/the (palace) no longer exists
It has been completely destroyed
There are chaos in the jungles ...it has been the deeds of the Dutch
(*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:170)

To verify the point, examples of various catastrophe were chronicled in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*; Dutch atrocities were quoted from regions under the Dutch controll–Singkil, Deli, Padang, Palembang etc.

As a defensive act, armed struggles against the Dutch came to be understood as mandatory religious duty (*wajib/fardhu*, as one of the pillars of Islam), in many instances it was said to be more important than the *hajj* itself (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:168). This basic urge of self defense was complemented and further justified in *Hikayat Prang Sabi* by quotations from Qur'anic verses and sayings of the Prophets—both emphasised strongly on the value and significance of *jihad*, especially its rewards and punishment. Prescribing *jihad* as a religious injunction, the author believed that it was imperative that the people of Aceh should sacrifice their lives, families and property for the preservation of God's religion.

To the *ulama* author in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, the defense of Aceh against the Dutch was seen as urgent and critical, and in critical time not only men were called to the battle field but he believed that women, children should also volunteer to fight and became active participants in war (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*:178). In normal war, Islamic women were usually sidelined; their roles

were confined to tending the injured and the sick (See, Amirul Hadi, 2011). The call for women and children to participate in *jihad* probably relayed the desperate voice of the *ulama* on the urgency of the war, which became the concern in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*. The call however was not unfounded—women volunteers did contribute actively in the Aceh's War against the Dutch. One such woman was Cut Nyak Dien, the wife of Teuku Umar, a renowned war commander from west Aceh. After his *syahid*, she took over her husband's command over the armies and continued the war campaign (Amirul Hadi, 2011, Ibrahim Alfian, 1987).

On another note, *Hikayat Prang Sabi* also perceived *jihad* against the Dutch as the extension and continuation of the Prophet's war against the infidels (the Dutch was sometimes referred to as Jews *Hikayat Prang Sabi*: 168). As a *sunnah Rasul*, the author felt that by waging war on the Dutch they were repeating the deeds of the Prophet and thus were on the right path. And they felt relieve that they had been blessed with this privilege, considered it as a gift from Allah (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:139). For they noted that since the Prophet's war, there was never a holy war in the land (he overlooked Iskandar Muda's long battle against the Portuguese). The author said (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:138)

It is better now my friends/for we are on the right path
In the past, my sweet hearts/the infidel had never been on the *Raja* Island
But now it seems that the infidel/have come to send us to heaven

One of the most interesting perception of Acehnese on the *prang kaphe*, may be seen in their view towards *syahid*—death in the holy war. Since death was seen as almost inevitable in war and the most feared, the author of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* lightened the concept and experience of death; he looked at death in war as a blessing (those who died as martyr, were lucky), the experience of death itself was painless (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:113), but what was more beautiful was the experience after death—the pleasure of *jannah* especially the love of Ainul Mardhiah (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:114, 117, 121-34); and the ease and blessings in *Mahsyar*. Of this the texts said: “the eyes that don't cry in *Mahsyar* were the eyes of the *syuhadas* (:149). In short, death as a martyr was perceived as the best death “the best way to return to your lord/is through the holy war” (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:166).

To avoid being misunderstood (that it was him that called for *jihad*) the *ulama* author post it that the command of *jihad* itself came from Allah (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:139-40) – he interspersed his *khutbah* with excerpts from

Quran that cited this command. In fact, his enthusiasm went a little bit too far when he claimed that it was Allah that commanded the war against the Dutch; he said (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:169) “... there is a verse in the Quran/Allah has ask us to fight the Dutch infidel.”

The war against the Dutch then was God’s war, it emulated the wars fought by the Prophet in yonder days, it was then the war on the right path –to defend the sovereignty of Islam, of the *raja*, of the land and the people. It was a righteous and justified war. Perceived as such, the author believed that the Acehese would be protected by God Almighty. He quoted instances where the invisible power of God was demonstrated; it appeared in various forms of miracles. And one such supernatural help was displayed in the *Perang Gajah* (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:140) when the Muslim armies came out victorious though their numbers were much smaller than the enemy. Another insinuation was reported in the incidence in Perang Idi, quoted by the author (*Hikayat Prang Sabi*, 1995:140):

See what happened my friends/recently in the war at Idi
 Many of the cursed infidel were killed/by knife wounds all over their faces
 Where did those knives come from, Teungku/when all the Muslims were
 in their fort
 Who could have done that brothers/who could have slashed them my friends?
 None of us could have slashed them/ for we only use bullets in battle.

ACEHNESE PERCEPTION OF *PRANG KAPHE*: THE WAR NARRATIVES

Hikayat Prang Cut Ali (*Hikayat Perang Kandang*) and *Hikayat Teungku di Meuka* (*Hikayat Prang Rundeng*) though entrenched in *jihād* ideology, were actual war stories. The *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali* related stories of the heroic ambush and attack against the Dutch in Kandang (in 1914). The insurgence was lead by Cut Ali, an *uleebalang* from Daya. *Hikayat Teungku di Meuke* took a slightly different turn from the normal practice of the *jihād* war. It portrayed the civil war (in 1893) between the *ulama* (Teungku di Meuku) in Rundeng and the Dutch ally, Lila Peukasa in Meulaboh. As a Dutch ally, Lila Peukasa was conceived by the *ulama* as the enemy of Islam and thus war against him was justified as a *jihād* war.

Both however, complimented and augmented the precepts of the *jihād* decreed in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*; they in fact dramatised and enacted these in the form of battle against the Dutch; the significance, the meaning and

values of *jihad* were embodied within the figures of the heroes of these battles. Especially obvious was the concept of *jihad* as a religious injunction, the fighting in *jihad* as a compulsory act of obedience to God's command, and thus an incumbent duty to every Muslim. To benefit the *pahala* and the rewards of *jihad* everyone then sought a martyr's death, for death as a martyr was considered lucky, we read these in the words pronounced by Cut Ali (*Hikayat Prang Cut Ali*) after the first clash with the Dutch:

Who amongst you have been lucky?
The fair maiden has been waiting for you

(*Hikayat Prang Cut Ali*, 1995: 385)

Since *jihad* was seen as the religious responsibility of every man, the *ulama* and the *uleebalang* took it upon themselves to lead the *jihad* war. With the rulers either defunct or exiled, it then became incumbent on them (*ulamas* and *uleebalang*) to organize armed insurgents to prevent Dutch's penetration into Aceh. Thus, after the capture and exile of the last Sultan of Aceh- Sultan Muhammad Daud Shah in 1903, the fighting was continued by *ulamas* and *uleebalang*, for example Teungku Cik di Tiro, Panglima Polem, Panglima Cut Ali, Teungku Di Meuke. These *uleebalangs* and *ulamas* later stood as *jihad* icons; their heroic exploits were documented and celebrated in works of literature. Through their valor and selfless deeds, these heroes inspired the people to march into the battlefield.

Cut Ali and Teungku di Meuka were such inspirations. As *jihad* fighters they embraced the true *jihad* spirit; through their voice, the author echoed aloud the universal ideology of *jihad*, as well as Muslim's passion towards it.

Without a legitimate authority to declare war, Perang Cut Ali and Prang Rundeng became what the Dutch termed as "people's war" (re Amirul Hadi, 2011). People's war was based on the concept of Muslim brotherhood, and solidarity, with shared common values and goal (which was strongly recommended in Islam). Both the texts enunciated these ideals clearly. The call for war became voluntary in both texts; people readily submitted themselves and their wealth for the purpose of *jihad*. Food and shelters were readily available wherever these warriors stop for a short respite. Prayers, blessings and good wishes accompany them before war.

The warriors in *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali* worked in unison with the leaders; strategies and decisions were jointly made, there were no contestation nor hesitation in any move or plan launched. All moves were synchronized, each

knew his role, his position and his target; thus all their attacks, ambush and amok went very smoothly. Since the war was on the path of Allah, every one submitted himself completely to the will of God, he believed as all *jihadist* did, that God will protect the fighters – twice in the narrative the insinuation prevailed:

- i) When a group of warriors were lost in the jungle for days, they suddenly saw smoke trailing in the sky; they followed the smoke and reached a settlement (*Hikayat Prang Cut Ali, 1995:323*)
- ii) After the first severe clashes with the Dutch – 48 Dutch were reported dead, but none of the Acehnese were injured. The text said, “The Muslim soldiers did not lose even a strand of hair” (*Hikayat Prang Cut Ali, 1995:388*).
- iii) They did not feel the pain of the bee stings because the text said:

“God spared us the pain”

(*Hikayat Prang Cut Ali, 1995:371*)

Reiterating the view held by *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, these *ulamas* and *uleebalang* post it that the Acehnese predicaments were the doing of the Dutch; several catastrophes were mentioned in the text – chaos in the villages (some were burnt down by the Dutch during the coup) breakup in families (husbands and sons had to retreat into the jungles to be guerillas); exploitation/oppression in the form arbitrary taxes and forced labour (they were forced to build jetties and barracks for the Dutch; to grow bananas and coconuts); tortures to those who disobeyed (imprisoned or beaten up, *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali, 1995:348-50*).

These and plus the infringement on religion and the slight on *maruah* (morale; in this text, *maruah* became the motive for war (*Hikayat Prang Cut Ali, 1995:350-53*), which later on was translated or transformed into the holy war; refer the episode when Cut Ali was being apprehended and degraded in public, *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali, 1995:351*) became the basis in waging war in *Hikayat Prang Cut Ali*.

Conceptualized within this frame of mind, the text justified the war as a defensive act against further molestation by the Dutch. As a defensive war every strategy, however mean, unjust and improper was legitimized. These included – laying bamboo spikes on roads (and covered with long grass), traps (beehive), camouflage, ambush, tricks, deception and attacking at the darkest of night.

To gain the upper hand and to make the war more potent (because of their small numbers and their lack of modern weapons), the fighters adopted the tactics of guerilla warfare (jungle warfare). This allowed them to move from one location to another, always baffling and eluding the Dutch (who were strangers to the land and the culture of the people). The strategies proved to be effective, since the warriors always get the support (for food and shelter) from village communities and they were also familiar with the forest ground. Thus Cut Ali and his small group of loyal *uleebalangs* conducted the *jihād* war successfully, maximizing attack while at the same time evading Dutch's arrest. Although in the end, they lost the war (in numbers and weapons) but Cut Ali and his five friends won in death, as every *jihadist* cherished and aspired.

Hikayat Perang Rundeng, still brought up the theme of *jihād* war, it re-enacted the civil war cum war against *kafir* in Rundeng, to illustrate the issues surrounding the *jihād* war. It held on the view that whosoever befriended (assisted or side with) the Dutch (or any *kafir*) became the enemy of Muslims and must be killed and his land as well as the land occupied by the Dutch according to the *fatwa* issued by Tengku Cik Kutawang (in Amirul Hadi, 2011:193-194) “become *dar al-harb* (the abode of war). Therefore everything within that area was legitimate booty for the Muslims.”

The *fatwa* was actually a reiteration of the decree proclaimed by the *sarakata perintah kerajaan* (21 March, 1873, Nurainy Ali, 1995:19) that said:

... whoever break their promise, and side with the enemies, that is the Dutch, they will be sentenced to death ... regardless of who they are. It is compulsory for us to fight the enemies, the Dutch and their allies.

This was the view held by Teungku di Meuka, a very respected *ulama* in Rundeng, nicknamed as “the mighty sword of the Rawa people” (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:59); and said to be “far-famed; his influence was paramount in the entire territory of Lila Peukasa” (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:59) By virtue of being an influential and venerated *ulama*, complemented by the ideology of the *jihād* war professed in the *sarakata* and admonished in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, the teungku managed to garner support and “war contributions” (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:59), fortified his village and pulled together a strong army in anticipation of the enemy's attack – Lila Peukasa and his ally the Dutch (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:59-62) or “the people from the river mouth” (Meulaboh, *Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:71).

The *sarakata* and *fatwa* legalized Tengku di Meuka to plunder the land (as abode of war); he blocked roads and trade from the hinterlands, obstructed communications with Meulaboh, built strong fortresses along the edge of all arable lands (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:59-58). These, so to speak, acts of punity against Meulaboh, offended Lila Peukasa and he consequently declared war against Rundeng.

It was literally a civil war, but was not perceived as such by the religious leader. Lila Peukasa had transgressed the *fatwa* and the declaration of the *sarakata*; he had signed a treaty with the Dutch, allowing them trade access into Meulaboh and the hinterlands (Ibrahim Alfian, 1987). He now had the full support of the Dutch (in the forms of weapons – guns and gun powder, *Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:69) to subdue the defiance *ulama* in Rundeng. He thus became the enemy of Islam and the people. The civil war was consequently cast as a religious war, and the resistance against Meulaboh was justified as war in defense of Islam.

Prescribed within such frame of mind, it is easy to understand the direction of thought, the emotion and action of Rundeng and its supporters. Warriors came voluntarily from “upstream and downstream, from east and west ... in redemption of a vow to the venerated Master (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:59). People looked up on the *ulama* (the so-called Master); they were drawn to Rundeng “where religion was upheld” (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:59); the support was seen as redemption of a vow made with the *ulamas* (admonished in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*) that everyone should participate in the *prang sabi*; that it was a religious duty to defend Rundeng against threat. The text said:

when they heard of war feeling ran high; they were likely to fling themselves
down on the pallisades

(*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:71)

Again here, religion became the unifying factor, the force and motive for *jihād*.

While on the the other side of Rundeng – at the rivermouth (Meulaboh), people were probably oblivious of the Islamic motive of the war. Or even if they were not, it did not become the contention for them to wage war. There were other factors looming in the background, probably more rational factors than mere religious zeal. As servants to the *raja* (Lila Peukasa), their livelihood depended on him. And the *raja* as head of state, they had to submit

their filiality to him in whatever situation (this was what tradition had taught them); even his alliance with the Dutch was considered as his prerogative (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:89); his command therefore became an obligation. Let us listen to the vow made by the *uleebalang* to Lila Peukasa:

“we are with you, exalted Lord
Through foul and fair, for better or for worse,
we are at your service”

(*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:63)

Here loyalty was feudalistic and thus absolute, the “exalted” ones were the rulers (their lord). Feudal ideology became the unifying factor, defending the *raja* became the force and motive for war. Survival seemed to over rule religious zeal.

This brings us to another issue, of a slightly different nature. After a prolonged and exhausting battle, one fighter confronted Teungku di Meuka and asked him (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:89):

You have no idea how we stand here...
You assert that you are conducting a holy war, why then do you hate Lila Peukasa?...
You consider us, the people of the rivermouth, as unbelievers... ..
You ignored the chief (Lila Peukasa); it would appear that you were the chief!

The questions somehow reflected the ambivalent attitude of the so-called *jihad* fighters in Rundeng-Meulaboh. They questioned the principle of *jihad* held by Teungku di Meuka. They sensed the wrongness in slaying their own brothers for the sake of defending an ideology. They felt that the *ulama* was to be blamed for the war, and that he was trying to sabotage the authority of Lila Peukasa. Some even speculated leaving the fight, seeing its worthlessness and senselessness. Others really fled to join Lila Peukasa – believing that Rundeng was an ill-fated country. I quote (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:83): “We had better go! Why should we be attached to an ill-fated country?”

Some fled because the *jihad* war had put a lot of stress on their economy (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:83):

Hulled rice and paddy have run out, we are hard-pressed for everything.

Furthermore, the atrocities caused by Teungku di Meuku – holding up trade, blocking products from the hinterland, harrasment by the guards at trading posts, monopolizing lands for farming, did not go down well with most people upstream (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:60). They were upset because these acts deprived them of their livelihood, and hindered communication to the harbour. In most cases they had to take longer routes via the sea to reach the harbour (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:60).

And thus it was at the end of the battle they came forth to voice their grievances (*Hikayat Perang Rundeng*, 1980:89):

Listen now to the ...reason: final retaliation on you (Tengku di Meuka)
 ...your prohibiting people from going to the rivermouth...
 You have cheated us at the rivermouth, you have taken away our gelded goats
 You have taken all our goats and ducks; you carried them off and brought them hither
 ...you have taken away all our nets and angling rods
 ... you blocked the river...

Based on these voices, there appeared to be some degree of antagonisms from certain quarters of the Acehnese towards the holy war waged by Teungku di Meuka. It is interesting to note the contestations and disaccord in these voices.

CONCLUSION

What then can be gathered from the above explication? The *Hikayat Perang Rundeng* indeed has revealed the other side of the Acehnese. In contrast to the popular assumption put forth in *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, *Hikayat Perang Rundeng* posed a slightly different character of the Acehnese, especially his perceptions and attitudes towards the *jihad* war. Probably one can, in a certain measure, sense the conflicting *jiwa* (inner conflict) of the Acehnese - the split in their attitude towards the war and the divide in their loyalty: between the traditional sovereign (*raja*) and the religious sovereign (*ulama*) (for further reading read: Noriah Taslim, 2010).

Unlike the other *hikayat prang*, *Hikayat Perang Rundeng* exhibits the other picture of the war, it shows the state of disarray the people were in, their uncertainty and indcisiveness in facing the war:

- (a) Some were shown to be drawn sometimes unwillingly (they said: “even though we should be unwilling... what can we do?” *Hikayat Perang*

Rundeng, 1980:89), other times for survival, into the hideous and tiresome battles.

- (b) It voiced their dislike for being called a *kafir* just because they were on the side of the *raja* at Meulaboh. They were actually ordinary *rakyat*, doing their best to serve the *raja* who had provide sustenance to their life.
- (c) Some were confused fighters who could not see the sense behind the civil war.
- (d) While others were more rational and practical in handling the war – these were fighters that would rather forgo Islamic ideals for more pressing need viz. economic survival.
- (e) Interestingly, there were even expressions of disgust and dissatisfaction from ordinary folk who found the holy war cumbersome as it disrupted their daily life and livelihood.

From the above exposition and the analysis earlier on, one can therefore gather the complexities of emotions, responses and perceptions of the Acehnese towards the so-called *jihad* war. The situations and issues of war depicted in these texts were a far cry from the general conception of *jihad*. Contrary to popular belief, the holy war did not have a similar grip on everyone. With that conclusion, I would like to end this essay.

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