elang Sipaku Gelang is a beloved local folk song. With National Day around the corner, this is certainly one of the familiar tunes that we music teachers can fall back on for our National Day celebrations in school. According to National Library’s website, this folk song is about ‘the virtue of respect and tolerance in community living.’ Let’s have a quick look at the meaning of the lyrics and its musical structure.

The most common translation is that ‘Gelang’ means ‘bracelet’ / ‘ring’ and is related to the word ‘Geylang’, an area in Singapore (e.g. in forums and children’s website). But as is the case of folk songs, this translation is not entirely definitive. I’d like to offer another reading here: that ‘Gelang’ is a species of creepers and ‘sipaku’ is a non-flowering fern of the species.

If we place this song within the genre of Malay traditional music, the song’s lyrics conform to the format of a Malay pantun (a classic Malay poetic structure): strophic and with a rhyme pattern of abab. It usually begins by making references to nature or a local place. The opening lyrics are often not ‘logically’ connected to the rest of the song (Matusky & Chopyak, 2001, p. 435). Once the beauty of the pantun is appreciated, the musical meaning of the song is clearer too!

REFERENCES


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