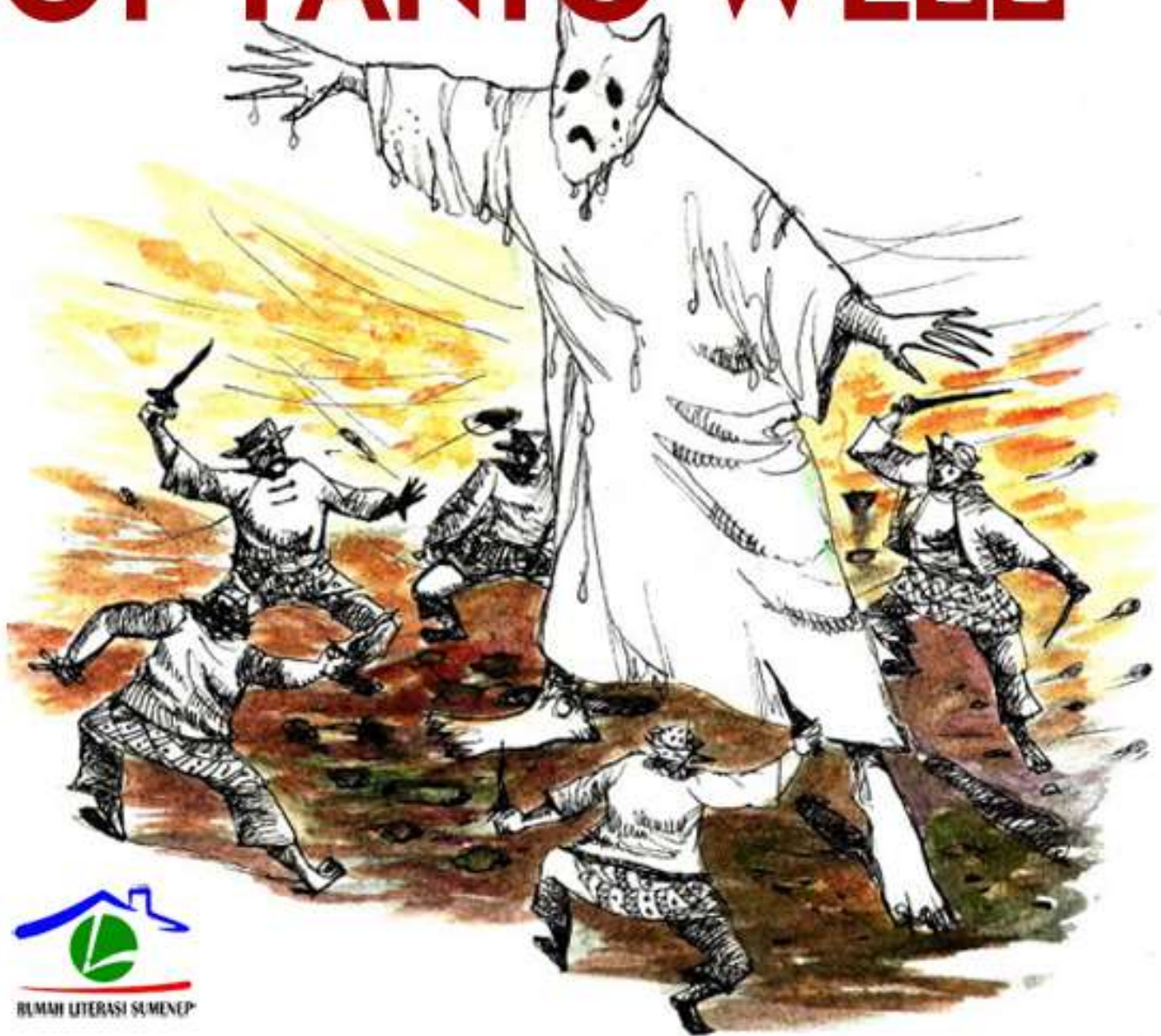


Abd. Warits

THE ORIGIN OF TANTO WELL



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Abdul Warits

The arid condition of Madura island barely provides water. A long time ago, wells were dug hundreds of metres for water in the valley and mountainside, but only few spouted out water. Some holes were open without any water. In fact, the wells that had water would run dry when the drought came.

In a small village in Maddupote—an area between Batang-Batang and Batuputih—there lived a husband and wife, Mattali and Sunima. They led a loving life despite not having any children in their old age. They had been married for twenty five years, but no child was born to bring more joy and completeness in their life. Sunima tirelessly prayed and fasted to ask God for a child. So did Mattali. He even willingly went to some shamans for help so that they would have a baby soon. He had done all the advice, from the simplest to the most difficult one such as sleeping out in Rongkorong Hill forty days, but with no success.

Mattali and Sunima had spent their wealth to visit shamans and pay for the ritual expenses in order to have a child. Moreover, their wealth was all gone because they had fines to pay to a cruel and stubborn king. The king was widely known with the name King Dulkemnek Banakeron who ruled Maddupote. Maddupote was actually a rebellious kingdom whose illegal authority was still under the leadership of Panembahan Joharsari, the King of Sumenep. King Dulkemnek gave an order that every childless family must pay 400 cent fine each month. The king claimed that the money would be

used to pay workers who were assigned to collect water from the valley, hills, and rivers that still had water. Those workers did the job everyday to fulfil the need of water in the king's palace.

Families who had children were free from the fine. They just had to send their children collect water for the king. The cruel king became more merciless when the drought came. He would cold-heartedly order underage children to collect water the whole day. Whenever those children took a break or felt exhausted, the king would tell

his soldiers to lash and punish them. The king's behavior had put the people in anxiety; those childless family had to pay the fine, while those who had children would have to watch their little kids carrying buckets full of water in the hot sun. They also had to helplessly watch their kids get tortured under the surveillance of the king's soldiers. Even worse, the people had a severe shortage of water because the king had taken most supply to the palace.

One day, Mattali and Sunima had no choice but to roast cassava for food because the water they had left was only enough for *wudu* (ritual washing before daily prayer for moslem). Most of their neighbours complained that they suffer from the king's pitiless policy. Many children often arrived home bruised or injured, while the other were found so exhausted and weak. Upon arriving home, many of the children got sick because, throughout the day, they were forced to bring water from several wells that were many kilometres away from Maddupote.

Mattale and Sunima were having a new habit; each night, they visited the neighbours whose children were sick. Mattali usually brought them some roasted cassava. Roasted cassava became their daily food of choice since the severe shortage of water

because water were not needed to roast cassava. When visiting one of their neighbour, Sadikin, Mattali could not hold back his tears when he heard about the 6 year old Sulaiman, Sadikin's son. Sulaiman was very sick because of the torture he got when working to get water for the king.

“How did you get all these bruises, Liman?” Mattali gently asked.

“This happened when I brought water to the palace, Grandpa. I was ordered to take water from the Village Pangabasen that was 3 km away and I had to walk through the rocky side of Montorra Hill. I barely found a tree there so that I had to walk on the rocky path in the very hot sun.”

“Then you got exhausted?”

“Yes, Grandpa. Besides those sharp rocks and the hot sun, I have carry a pair of big buckets made of palmyra leaves.”

Mattali shook his head and said no word. His tears began to roll. It was just too hard for him to accept that a little boy like Sulaiman had to take such a huge burden.

“Did you fill your big buckets full?” Sunima added.

“Yes, Grandma. In fact, one king's guard who watched over me told me not to spill the water, not even a single drop. If I did that, he will whip me over and over.”

“What a heartless man!” Mattali spoke while wiping away his tears.

“ It did not stop there, Grandpa. Whenever I felt so tired and took some rest, they will whip me again.”

“How many times did you go back and forth from the well to the palace?”

“They entire day I brought back 12 buckets of water to the palace along with various torture.”

“Did they feed you?”

“They just gave me four cuts of steamed taro. They were not bigger than an adult’s thumb because, for the guards, I was just a little kid who did not need much food.”

Both Mattali and Sunima sobbed. They cried next to Sulaiman who was lying down weak. It was one of the stories Mattali heard about the children who were forced to get water for the king. However, there were even worse stories. Nyai Naimah, an old woman who lived alone, was found unconscious with bleeding lips after being kicked by the king’s soldiers for failing to pay the fine.

Days after, it was not only the children who got sick due to the cruelty, but also their parents. They were getting sick because of the mental pressure resulting from watching their children being tortured everyday. Almost everyone in Maddupote were sick. Only few were able to recover, but many died of their sickness. Eventually, water problem became worse and triggered a new problem among the people. Other than diseases and mental stress, some people had to die from fighting each other for water. At the time, Madurese people considered water rare and the most precious object that deserved protection and fight to the death. Since then, a fight to the death was not only a matter of protecting the wife from other men’s seduction but also protecting water. Mattali and Sunima had to face another dark and sad fact. Almost everyday, they found their neighbours dead with their bodies covered in blood, slashed with *celurit* (Madurese traditional sickle-like weapon).

Mattali and Sunima were among those who survived from the disease and chaos resulting from the water problem. They were able to control themselves despite sharing the same hatred to the king. Mattali then initiated to gather the people to send prayers to the God that He would remove their pain and grant

them prosperity. After the ritual of sending prayers, the people usually continued to discuss the problems in the neighbourhood.

“We have so many problems here, dear old man. Water shortage, deadly fights, and deaths caused by diseases. I even heard someone is insane because of mental pressure,” a neighbour informed Mattali.

Mattali nodded while caressing his beard. He bowed his head for a while and then lifted up the head and looked at the sky.

“Yes. You are right. Our problems are so many. But, the root of those problems is the same; our king has been unfair and acting cruelly,” Mattali answered calmly.

“So, what should we do other than praying, dear old man ?”

Mattali took a deep breath and exhaled slowly while bending his head again.

“I really do not know. But, by praying like this, I believe God will give us a solution in an unpredictable way.”

“I do hope so, dear old man.”

Mattali and all his fellow neighbours were just peasants who were powerless to overthrow the cruel king. They just kept praying all the time. For the water problem, however, they also tried to find new wellsprings from several spots in the area: from the valley, farms, to the rocky hills. They persistently tried to locate new springs in spite of harsh obstacles. Their attempts, nevertheless, did not find a good result soon. Discovering spring in Maddupote was as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack. However, their persistence finally paid off. A spring was located in the side of Montorra Hill.

Hand in hand, the people dug the spring in turns and secretly so that the king would not know it.

After digging 16 meters deep, water spurted out swiftly. The people smiled happily. Since then, the people began to take water from Montorra Hill through a secret path so that the palace would not know it. Many were happy with the wellspring, including Mattali. Things were getting better and better for Mattali when he found his wife three months pregnant. Mattali just could not be happier.

The happy moment, however, lasted two months only. Afterward, he had to face a sad fact. The well discovered by the neighbours was seized by the palace. One of the neighbours betrayed and informed the king about the well location. King Dulkemmek Banakeron was furious. He did not just arrogate the well from the people, but also put Mattali into jail.

When Sunima's pregnancy was five months old, Mattale had to leave his sweet wife to serve prison. The King hated Mattali so much for helping his neighbours discovering the well. Each day, Mattali had to endure punishment from the king.

In jail, Mattali had to go through painful days. Each day, he was whipped by the guard while hold back his own feeling that missed his sweet pregnant Sunima so much. He should have lived happy days with his pregnant wife after years longing for a child. But they were separated instead.

During his time in jail. Mattali never wasted any single night. His nights were full of prayers so that both his wife and the baby would always be fine. Mattali hoped that someday his child would grow to a warrior that would fight

the king's cruel tyranny. He asked God that his child would live as a hero who protected the helpless people.

While in jail, Mattali often thought that the king's tyranny had suppressed people's lives. Meanwhile, Sunima often shed tears in her prayers. Being pregnant, she was without her dear husband. Only her mother always kept her accompanied. But, she was there for Sunima during the daylight only and would return home at nights to her own house in the next village. In her time without her mother company, she would feel really lonely and would miss her husband Mattali even much more. Her mind would bring back the image of her husband caressing her growing belly. In her cry, she talked to her unborn baby inside her body.

"Sweetie, you have been so lonely without your father here. This is all because of that cruel king. Sweetheart, when you are grown up someday, I hope you can defeat the king who has been oppressing our people," Sunima wept, hoping that the child inside her would turn into the guardian of people

At her eight months pregnancy, Sunima became very poor. She lost all of her wealth to pay the water fine to the king. She also had to buy water from the palace at an insanely high price. Since her husband served jail, Sunima had had to get water by herself. Being a woman, she always felt unsafe and scared to walk alone to get water from a place far away from her house. For that reason, she preferred buying the water instead of its high price.

In her late pregnancy, Sunima often had dreams of which she met her husband on a hill. When they were hugging each other, water bursted out from dozens of spring between the rocks. As soon as water streamed down the hill, the king suddenly came without any guard. Strangely, in her dream, the king

had a tiny physical figure instead of his real big and strong figure. The king then bent his knees before Mattali. When the king was bending his knees, Sunima usually woke up from her sleep. She sweated. Her feelings were mixed between scare and happiness for having a dream to see her husband who was in jail.

After having the same dream several times, she began to worry. She thought that her dream could be either a good or bad sign. Everytime, she was concerned about her husband condition while in jail. Unable to handle her growing concern anymore, she finally decided to tell her mother about her dream.

After listening to her daughter who told all about her dreams, Sunima's mother smiled but immediately raised her hand and put her forefinger to her lips.

"Sssttt. Do not tell anyone about your dreams. I am afraid someone would tell the king about it and he will be very angry to hear what is happening in your dreams." Sunima's mother suggested.

"So, do you know what my dreams mean, Mother? I really want to know."

"I have no idea, darling! But I sense something good from your dreams."

Sunima remained silent. She might feel that telling her mother about her dreams was a waste. What she really wanted was to know the meaning of her dreams from her mother. Unfortunately, her mother could not tell her anything.

In jail, Mattali often cried too. He always thought how hard Sunima's days during her late pregnancy. He recalled how his friends' pregnant wives would need a special assistance. Instead, Sunima had to go through her days

alone amid the harsh condition. Every so often, Mattali had dreams about Sunima when he was sleeping between his nighttime prayer and dawn. In his dreams, Sunima was running while carrying the sun to the prison gate. She came to the prison weeping, but left smiling happily. Mattali got worried about his dreams that happened almost every night. He could not get the meaning of his dreams. He could only guess between a good or bad sign. He just could not hold his tears when thinking about his pregnant wife.

After nine months, the awaited baby came. It was a boy. He was born on Friday at daybreak. Sunima was alone when she gave birth to her son. It was not until the baby cried that helps from her neighbors came. Sunima was so happy to give birth to a healthy son, but as soon as she remembered her imprisoned husband, her tears rolled down. She shed more tears because there was no one reciting azan to her baby's ears.

Right after sunrise, when the midwife finished bathing the baby on a bamboo bed, her mother came. She then recited azan to her grandson. For her, it was an emergency situation since many men in the village were busy getting water while the others were lying sick. To not waste the holy Friday, the was named on the same day.

“This a good day. We had better give him a name right now,” Sunima's mother suggested. The midwife nodded while Sunima mulled over for a moment.

“Who will give the name, Mother?”

“Before your father passed away, he had left me a name that someday will be your child's name. Your father asked me to keep the name just for your

child because, for him, the name was so special. He got it after meditating on Lenteng Hill.”

“What is that given name, Mother?”

“Landaaur. The name came from a heroic figure who persistently protected his people. He was also a brave man who feared nothing to defend the truth and justice. Your father wished that your child will grow up as a hero who will protect and defend people’s rights.”

Well, if that is father’s wish, I am honored to take the name for my son, Mother.” Then, Sunima’s son was granted the name Landaaur. The neighbors were so happy with the name that everyday, they called the baby’s name when her mother was carrying him in their house terrace.

Since Landaaur’s arrival, Sunima’s house was not so quiet anymore. The house was not only filled with the companion of her mother who stayed every night in Sunima’s house, but also the adorable noise of Landaaur’s cries. Sunima was happier although still kept great sadness realizing that her husband was still uninformed about his son’s birth.

Sunima was not able to send any information about the birth of Landaaur to her husband. In fact, Sunima had not received any news about her imprisoned husband for almost a year. Both could only guess each other’s condition. The king’s cruelty had brought them misery for the painful separation.

Time went by. Landaaur grew to an adorable toddler. Meanwhile, the people’s live was much worse. Sunima nevertheless did not care so much about her sorrow for having Landau’s laughters that always cheered her up all the

time. Even in his very early age, Landaur already showed a sense of humanity. His tears fell down any time he saw the village boys walked pass through his house, carrying buckets full of water, heading for the palace. Landau often asked questions about what those boys did every day. Sunima then explained about what the village had suffered from. Every so often, Landaur startled to hear his mother's explanation. One sad fact went into his mind, his neighbors could hardly get any water.

Landau never hesitated to try to get his father's *celurit* that was hanged on the wall, next to the window, any time he watched those village kids got beaten up and tortured when taking water. Unfortunately, he was too small, unable to reach his father's weapon. All he could do was just raising his hands as high as he could. Each time watching his son's attempt to get the *celurit*, Sunima just smiled and shook her head.

“Daur! What are you going to do with that *celurit*?”, once Sunima asked.

“Daur will kill those cruel guards who have tortured Daur's friends,

Mother.” “Hmmm, you are not big enough. You need to grow bigger. That is why you have

eat a lot so that your hands can reach that *celurit*. Any time I ask you to finish your meal, you have to finish it,” Sunima told Landaur, using the moment to persuade Landaur so that he would eat more. Landaur's appetite was lower than the other kids at his age.

“If I eat too much, I will sleep too often. Those who sleeps often are friends of the devil. Just look at those cruel soldiers, Mother. They become devil's friends for eating too much,” Landaur responded while instantly walked out to the terrace.

Sunima frowned. She felt confused with Landaur's responses that were often illogical, but he always came up with logical answers. Sunima also thought that Landaur had already acquired adult way of thinking although still in his early age. Another frightening fact crawled in her mind, the merciless king of Maddupote.

In his nine years of age, Landaur started to practice fasting, following his religious teacher, Kyai Mahfudz. Landaur would fast once every two days. Strangely, his body grew much bigger than the typical children. Only nine years old, Landaur had already been as high as his mother. During their banter, Sunima usually asked his son about his fast-growing body. Landaur would answer the question, "So I can get my father out from prison." Landaur obviously had learnt another sad fact of his imprisoned father.

Years later, Landaur grew to a handsome, bright-skinned, tall, and strong young man. In his 15 year-old age, Landaur had already been interested in visiting different places to learn the condition of the villages in Maddupote. He was also a healer for his sick neighbors. Therefore, he chose to move from one place to another in order to be able to help sick people. The people around Maddupote felt so proud and to have Landaur. They took him as their new hero. From day to day, the neighbors were getting excited to be visited by Landaur. In addition to his healing activity, Landaur also provided them wise advice and support.

Eventually, the king heard about Sunima's son. King Dulkemnek Banakeron ordered some guard to meet Sunima and ask her to send her son to collect water for the king. Arriving at Sunima's house, they did not find Landaur. Once they arrived, Landaur had already left for another journey. The

guards were so angry and yelled at Sunima. They then went back to the palace and came to Sunima's house the next day, but still, Landaur was not home.

The guards were furious and threatened Sunima that they would kill Landaur. Hearing the threat, Sunima hysterically cried. It was not until the third visit that the guards could finally meet Landaur. Landaur, with hospitality and good manner, welcomed the guards, six of them, in the sittingroom, but those guards yelled at him instead. Landaur tried to stay calm and once again politely asked them to go into the sittingroom. However, they acted unmannerly and challenged Landaur to fight. Landaur was left with no choice but to accept the challenge. It was one against six. It did not take long before Landaur won the fight, leaving his opponents on the ground, bleeding. Without any weapon, Landaur did not find any difficulty to defeat those six soldiers.

Strangely, there was no scratch on Landaur's skin although he was hit many times with sword, machete, and *celurit* by those sly soldiers. At the end, those soldiers, badly wounded, left Sunima's front yard.

The king was enraged to find his six soldiers entering the palace with injured and bleeding bodies. He felt so humiliated because the his best soldiers were easily defeated. The king then ordered his general accompanied by archers to go to Sunima's house. This time, the king did not give an order to arrest Landaur, but to kidnap Sunima and put her in jail. "This is the only way to hurt Landaur," the king told his soldiers.

The general and dozens of archers went to Sunima's house at night. They successfully kidnapped Sunima after midnight because it happened that at this time Landaur was usually not home. As the king's order, Sunima was put

behind bars. Two days later, when he arrived from his journey, Landaur knew what happened to his mother. He was so sad to know his mother being kidnapped when he was not home. “This must be the king’s dishonest trick to get me to the palace,” Landaur spoke to himself while staring at his father’s *celurit* that hanged on the wall.

The next day, Landaur decided to go for a meditation before coming to the palace to bring his parents out of the prison as well as set the people free. He slipped the *celurit* in his belt then headed for Asta Gurangaring ‘Shrine of Gurangaring’ to meditate. Asta Gurangaring was where Landaur’s spiritual teacher, Kiai Mahfuz, was buried.

Asta Gurangaring was located in the east of Lombang Beach, in Sumenep. There, Landaur performed his meditation to pray so that God would show him the best way to solve his problems. People say that during his meditation Landaur was sitting decently cross-legged on a big black stone, facing Mecca. Landaur meditated for four years, four months, and four days. During his meditation, Landaur ate only a palmyra fruit once in a month. The palmyra fruits were carried by a pigeon that guarded the shrine.

After finishing his meditation, right after the last midnight, a shaft of light appeared and got into Landaur’s body. Next, Landaur felt so light and warm. The light disappeared in Landaur’s body. It gave nothing, in fact Landaur’s *celurit* also vanished along with the light disappearance. After doing his morning prayer, Landaur took a short sleep. After waking up, he found his body very big and tall, like a giant that he knew from his mother’s stories. The big stone he had been sitting on while meditating smashed into pieces, unable to take Landaur’s extreme weight. Carefully, Landaur tried to

get up. When standing up straight, he could see the distant places and villages since he was higher than even the tallest coconut tree.

When Landaur was standing up, suddenly within the sky, there emerged Kiai Mahfuz's voice as if he was whispering to Landaur. "Daur! Go walk to the southwest. Pass through people's fields. Keep walking straight to the direction until you get to the king's palace. Defeat that cruel king. Set free your parents and the people who were imprisoned. Go now!"

Landaur moved his legs. Each time he stepped on the ground, his foot sank three metres deep into the land and when he pulled up his foot, his footprint left a spring. The people, who were initially scared of Landaur's appearance, were so happy and danced with glee to see water swiftly spurted. People in throngs rushed to the springs made by Landaur's feet. The distance between one spring and another was one kilometre. The springs were lined straight from the Asta Guranggaring to the southwest.

Once arriving to the palace, Landaur stood before the gate. The king's soldiers gathered while shooting Landaur with arrows, but their attempt was a waste. The arrows could not harm Landaur. In fact, the arrows shattered once they touched Landaur's skin. Some soldiers ran scared. Landaur stood still and observed the palace that, in his eyes, was only the size of a bucket. All the prisoners smiled to see Landaur's appearance.

King Dulkemmek Banakeron finally appeared fully equipped with his armor and weapons. He was surprised to find Landaur's gigantic figure. The king realized that he was only as big as Landaur's finger. Fear started to seize him and he felt that his weapons would not do any good. When the king was still in his confusion, Landaur stomped his feet once. As his feet hit the

ground, , the palace's roof collapsed and half of the wall cracked. Landaur's stomping feet caused an earthquake. The soldiers started to move back because thousands of arrows were useless. After that, the king took off his clothe and thrusted a kris into his own heart. He then fell over, bled heavily, and finally died.

The people and all prisoners shouted with joy to see Landaur's victory. All of the king's soldiers surrendered. Next, Landaur's hand pulled and removed the prison bars with ease. The prisoners went out with a huge cheer. Among the prisoners, there appeared Sunima, Landaur's mother, who was holding an old man's hand. Landaur was so happy to meet his mother again.

When Landaur's excitement culminated, his body suddenly shrank to his normal size. His mother than inroduced him to the old man. It was Mattali, Landaur's father whom he had never seen before. Landaur, Sunima, and Mattali hugged each other and cried. A few days later, people of Maddupote decided to make Landaur is their king.

However, Landaur chose to give back Maddupote to Panembahan Mandaraga, the son of Panembahan Joharsari.

Since then, there was no torture or tax anymore. Great harvest came from rich and productive fields. Landaur's footprints along the way from Asta Gurangaring to the palace kept gushing out that the people in Maddupote would never run out of water. They later on made wells from the springs and called it *Tanto Well*.

The *Tanto Well* believed to be Landaur's footprints continues to flow. They are only three metres deep. We can find those wells toward the southwest, starting from the east part of Lombang Beach to the palace. The

distance between one well to the next is one kilometres. However, currently, there are only few left. Some of them are located in the small place called Bungduwak, in the village of Gapura Timur.



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