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Forest Significant and Conservation among the Semaq Beri Tribe of Orang Asli in Terengganu State, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Orang Asli are an indigenous ethnic group found in peninsular Malaysia. It is estimated that more than 60% of them reside within outskirt and rural areas. These types of settlement areas are commonly synonymous with forest environments. The Semaq Beri tribe in Terengganu state are one of such aforementioned communities living in such environments. Their lives are largely dependent on the forests as a source of sustenance and livelihood. In other words, their lives are closely linked with forests or the biodiversity associated to it. **Objective:** A study had been conducted to fathom the thoughts of the Semaq Beri tribe regarding the forests based on the following questions; (i) What is the status of the forest and what are their perspectives on it, (ii) How significant are the forests in the daily lives of community members, and (iii) What is the attitude towards ensuring the sustainability of the forest. The study data were gathered through observation techniques, participation observation as well as interviews. **Results:** The study results showed that the Semaq Beri tribe possess their own distinctive thoughts on the forest environment and life. Among others, the forest or biodiversity is believed to be a gift from the supernatural powers and is alive, similar to humans. The forests were created by the supernatural powers for the benefit and harmony of human life, namely to provide necessities such as sustenance, livelihood, medicine as well as other various resources. **Conclusion:** Based on this status, the forest is often likened similar to a 'bank', an institution where individuals store their wealth, and which this wealth can be withdrawn whenever necessary. Based on such a perception also leads to the Semaq Beri tribe's approach in ways of exploiting, conserving and safeguarding the sustainability of the forest so that its benefits will not only be enjoyed by the current generation, but also for generations to come.

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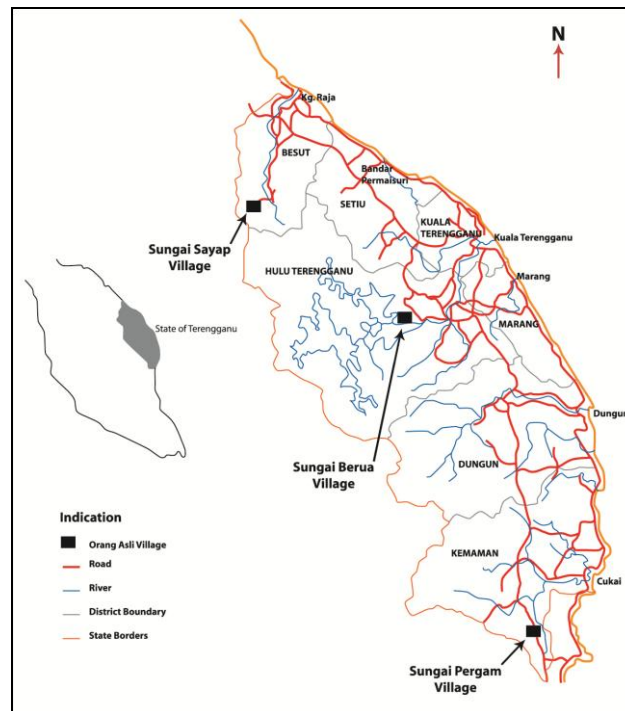
INTRODUCTION

To date, Terengganu State has 980 Orang Asli residents distributed in three different villages¹, namely Kampung Sungai Pergam in Kemaman, Kampung Sungai Berua in Hulu Terengganu and Kampung Sungai Sayap in Besut. The location of each village is shown in Figure 1. They consist of the Semaq Beri and Batek tribes. Approximately 704 individuals or 96% of them are from the Semaq Beri tribe residing in Kampung Sungai Pergam and Kampung Sungai Berua (JAKOA, 2011). Ethnographers classify the Semaq Beri as one of the tribes from the Senoi² group. The word 'Semaq' and 'Beri' are two separate words. In Malay 'Semaq' is derived as 'People' while 'Beri' defines as 'Jungle'; therefore Semaq Beri translates as 'Jungle People'. Such description had been highlighted by Endicott (1975) in his writing titled 'A Brief Report on the Semaq Beri of Pahang'. In it, Endicott defined the Semaq Beri as 'Jungle People' which translates as 'Orang Hutan'³ in the Malay language.

The lifestyle scenario of the Semaq Beri tribe in Terengganu state are similar to other Orang Asli communities of other states throughout Malaysia. Their traditional lifestyles are directly associated with the forests which act as the surrounding background of their settlements (Lye, 2002; Hood, 1993). Forests form the basis of their economic activities in obtaining food supplies, livelihood as well as a source of daily necessities.

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In addition to the economic context, relationships are also intertwined based upon the awareness that the forest is an ancestral heritage inherited over the generations (Karim, 1981; Howell, 1984). Also a number of natural environmental aspects, particularly how the forests have direct links with the realms of beliefs, including the practice of certain rites such as shamanism and faith healing rituals (Hood, 1978; 1995).



Sources: Ramle (2001)

Fig. 1: Distribution of Orang Asli in state of Terengganu, Malaysia.

Issues on the Importance of Forest Management/ Biodiversity:

The biodiversity of forests are part of the heritage of certain communities and must be sustainably managed and taken advantage of wisely now and thus conserved for future generations. It is on such principle that the issue of use and conservation of the natural environment particularly biodiversity has been taken seriously by the world community. Among others, in June 1992 the United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Declaration) had given special attention on the importance of environmental management and biodiversity within the context of development and society wellbeing (Anaya, 2004). Also of concern are the roles that must be played by various countries in ensuring the sustainable use of resources, and the roles of the indigenous people as partners in related matters (Yogeswaran, 2007).

In accordance with the Rio Declaration, many countries have sought to create a clearer and more effective policy in environmental management and biodiversity. For ASEAN countries the efforts taken for such matters are very clear. For example comparing between Indonesia and Malaysia; in Indonesia more extensive policies have been established for such purposes by taking into account the status of relationships and importance of local residents with the surrounding environments (Acciaioli and Erb, 2008). Such is the case for every provincial area (Elviariadi, 2011) and special areas such as National Parks (Acciaioli, 2008). Similar actions have also been taken by the government of Malaysia. A number of policies have been established such as the National Policy on Biological Diversity 1998 (MOSTI, 1998), National Environmental Policy 2002 (Ibrahim and Sarah, 2011) and Environmental Quality Act 2004 (Shamsudin, 2011). Among the objectives of these policies are towards ensuring the conservation of the country's unique biological heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. Prior to these policies Malaysia also has the National Forestry Policy 1978 (Amendment 1992) and National Forestry Act 1984 (Hood and Bettinger, 2008; Dahlan, 2011) which have similar objectives. All the policies established is an instrument that serves to ensure forest management and conservation as well as biodiversity that is stable and ensures its sustainability practices.

The aspiration that the world and many countries wish to achieve on the use and management of biodiversity is indeed the recommendations of various religions, especially in Islam (Azrina, 2011; Mohd. Azlan and Abdul Gulam, 2012), besides the inspirations of numerous community groups. Each community group has its own traditional knowledge in relation to the environment as well as strategies to ensure sustainability for the purpose of continuous use (Elviariadi, 2011). The knowledge and strategies possessed by these various groups

has indeed received recognition at national and global level and benefited in relevant matters (Yogeswaran, 2007). Based on the framework of such issues this paper seeks to explain some of the questions related to the thinking of the Semaq Beri tribe in the context of their relationships with the environment and biodiversity. In particular the question at hand are as follows: what is the status of the forest from their perspective, how significant is the forest in daily lives, and how are their attitudes towards the sustainment of these relevant resources.

Objectives:

The development process taking place does not end the dependence of the Semaq Beri tribe towards forests. Until now the forest is considered as a valuable treasure of resources in daily life. Accordingly, this paper gives focus on the following objectives; (i) To provide an explanation on the thinking of the Semaq Beri tribe regarding the status of the forest, (ii) To identify the importance of forests in their lives, and (iii) To understand the attitudes and actions in conserving the sustainability of forest for present and future generations.

Literature Review:

The natural environment is synonymous to the lives of the Orang Asli, especially in the aspects of its significance and life dependence towards this element. Up to now there are a number of researchers who have discussed upon the dependence issue of the community towards the natural environment, particularly forests that has largely become the background of their settlements. Early writers who have discussed such issues are Skeat and Blagden (1906), Evans (1915; 1920) and Williams-Hunt (1952). They displayed the general ways of life of the Orang Asli community especially the Senoi and Negrito groups, as well as the relations in economic activities carried out with the forest environment surrounding their respective settlement areas.

Later on, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed authors such as Dentan (1968), Schebestta (1973), Rambo (1979), Needham (1974), Endicott (1974; 1979), Dunn (1975), Carey (1976), Karim (1977), Hood (1978), Howell (1982; 1983) and Kuchikura (1988) which also discussed similar issues, even featuring life dependence situations of the Orang Asli community in particular towards the forest. Dunn (1975) for instance discussed in focus related search and gathering activities of forest products carried out by the Orang Asli community as well as the business flow structure of forest products collected. Forest products such as rattan and aloeswood are among the types of forest products that are the primary source of income of the Orang Asli community. However, in marketing the forest products, the business flow structure which is based on capitalist economic systems often causes the Orang Asli to earn much less than they should. Greater profits are earned by the middlemen and operators or exporters from towns. Endicott (1974) also described a similar situation. Based on the lives of the Batek tribe, Endicott explains that there is a sufficiently high rate of dependence of the tribe towards the forest, whereas the forest is a source of sustenance and livelihood. Also explained is that the economic activities of the Batek tribe are symbiotic in nature. Although the dependence on forests as a source of sustenance and other necessities is very high, they also have contact networking with outer communities especially in the context of marketing the forest products.

A study by Gomes (1986) among the Orang Asli of the Semai tribe also saw the economic activities of this tribe having a high affinity with the forest. It was explained that the Semai tribe undergo various economic activities within the forest perimeters surrounding the settlements, such as in search of rattan, aloeswood and fruits. They are usually flexible in determining the economic activities to be performed. Such an economic activity will be carried out if deemed more profitable, and will be abandoned immediately or choose of other economic activities if the ongoing economic activity is no longer profitable. A study by Kuchikura (1988) towards the Semaq Beri tribe did not only explain on the dependence level of the tribe towards forests as a source of sustenance, but also discussed in detail the daily consumption of food sources obtained from forests. More than 70% of their diet is obtained from forests through a variety of activities including hunting. The rest is obtained from outside communities nearby which they frequently make contact with.

Studies in the 1990s to the present as represented by Hood (1995), Karim (1997), Lim (1997), Ramle (1993; 2001), Lye (2000; 2002), Kazuhiro (2008), Nurul Fatanah (2009) and Asmawi (2013) still indicates a high dependence level among the Orang Asli communities towards the forest. Apart from highlighting this dependence level in general terms such the studies made by Ramle (1993; 2001), Hood (1995) and Lye (2000; 2002), a number of researchers also discussed the dependence pattern of certain tribes towards the forest on a more specific note. For example, the study by Karim (1997) discussed in specific the dependence of the Mah Meri tribe towards the forest as a source in producing wood carving products. A study by Nurul Fatanah (2009) discussed the skills of the Batek tribe in exploring the forests to fulfill various needs. On the other hand, studies by Kazuhiro (2008) and Asmawi (2013) discussed on the dependence of the Semaq Beri tribe towards the forest as a source of sustenance.

Indeed, writings in the context of the Orang Asli community – forest relationship until now feature a fairly high level of dependence of the Orang Asli towards forests. This article, amongst others also discusses on this situation, and furthermore gives focus on the issues among the Semaq Beri tribe. Even more importantly, this

article will also discuss on the concept of forests according to the Semaq Beri's way of thinking as well as the forest conservation methods practiced by them.

Theoretical of Framework:

As previously mentioned, this paper gives focus on the relationships of the Orang Asli community with the environment, especially forests which is the primary source of their daily needs. Explanations on this situation are made based on the cultural ecological theory approach introduced by Julian Haynes Steward (January 31, 1902 – February 6, 1972), an American anthropologist. The fundamental idea of this theoretical approach states that the lives of humans and a variety of wildlife within an ecosystem are interconnected between one another (Sham, 1986; Seftyono, 2011). Therefore, humans possess the perceptions, knowledge and distinctive methods to adapt to their local environment within their localisation to ensure sustainability in the present and future life (Karim, 1997). Thus, the cultures of groups of communities are considered as essential elements in the process of environmental management. The basic moral and awareness towards responsibilities in environmental care would surely reduce conflicts and a variety of other problems in environmental management as what is currently faced. In other words, cultural elements such as beliefs, customs, taboos and world views of a certain community group is directly linked to the process of adaptation to the local environment as well as their methods of environmental conservation.

Since its inception, this theoretical approach has been widely used by previous researchers. In studies related to Orang Asli communities in Malaysia, apart from Rambo (1979), Karim (1997), Hood (1995), Lim (1997), this approach has also been used by Kuchikura (1988), Lye (2000; 2002), Nurul Fatanah (2009), Seftyono (2011) and Asmawi (2013). In this paper, it is specifically used as the basis to explain some of the issues in the relationship context of the Semaq Beri tribe with the natural environment, covering the aspects that have been described previously.

Methodology:

Information related to the study problems have been collected through fieldwork carried out and ongoing basis starting from 1986 in two (2) Semaq Beri villages in the state of Terengganu, namely Kampung Sungai Pergam in Kemaman and Kampung Sungai Berua in Hulu Terengganu. Three (3) specific periods of fieldwork were carried out; (i) Fieldwork carried out from 1986 till 1988, (ii) Fieldwork carried out from 1997 till 2001, and (iii) Fieldwork carried out from 2006 till 2007. Through the fieldworks undertaken the following techniques were applied in order to collect the relevant ethnographical data:

a) Observation:

This technique was used to observe the practices of local residents in exploiting and conserving the forests surrounding their settlements. Observations were made by participating in the forest related activities of community members such as searching and collecting forest products.

b) Interview:

Interviews were carried out in order to get clarification on the dimensions of the research questionnaires as stated. A number of residents from groups of religious leaders, community leaders and individuals who actively implement gathering of forest products were used as a source of information. The interview processes were carried out in stages, namely interviews in general, specific interviews and focused interviews.

c) Study of Previous Documents:

Various earlier studies, records from various relevant departments and other reading materials were used as secondary data. The information contained in this form is particularly important as reference and backup to the study findings obtained through the fieldwork undertaken.

In summary, the study findings were based on two information sources; (i) Primary and (ii) Secondary sources. The coupling pattern of both relevant data sources in producing the study findings is shown in the following diagram (Figure 2).

The data collected from the various techniques were analysed to provide a visual pattern or definition of the issues studied. The analysis process was based on the following procedures; (i) To review and refine data; (ii) To compile data according to the themes determined; and (iii) Data coding.

Findings:

A close-knit relationship of a certain community group with the natural environment, especially those who largely depend on this type of environment is something that is normal and justifiable (Elviariadi, 2011) for example in the Semaq Beri tribe. In this context they have their own distinctive perspectives and emotional values towards the forest environment. Scrutiny and analysis on the ethnographic data collected showed that their perspectives from relevant dimensions are as follows:

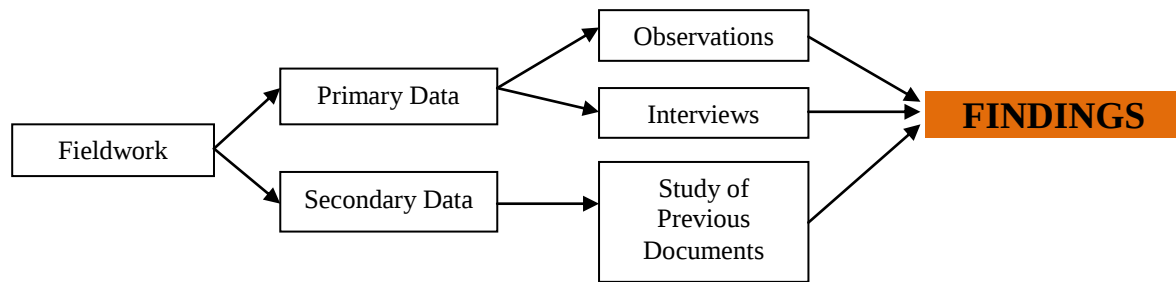


Fig. 2: Structure of data collection.

a) Forests Status:

From a Semaq Beri's point of view, a forest refers to trees that grow naturally in large quantities, and the biodiversity contained therein. They believe that trees found within the forests is life itself created by the supernatural powers after the creation of man⁴. The purpose of its creation is to provide a source of sustenance to humans as well as other needs such as clothing, materials to build shelter and weapons. As the story goes:

'In the beginning, God⁵ created the Earth dry, without a single tree, hot with its soil cracking. He then created human beings in a pair. What started of as two, quickly reproduced into many? Once the number of humans grew significantly, so did the problems that came along with it. The main problem at hand was of obtaining food and clothing. After some thoughtful thinking, humans finally sought God's assistance in creating trees in which can be utilised as sources for clothing, food and shelter. Humans alike, God only created a few in the beginning, but in time the trees spread like wildfire, and this is as to how forests came about'.

All trees and plants are believed to have originated from humans. There exist at least two versions of the story from the Semaq Beri community that describes the process as to how God initially created trees and plants alike. First, the version that states trees and plants originating from human beings cursed by God⁶. The second version tells the story of trees existing in the aftermath of humans killing and chopping of flesh of their own kin⁷. The story of the origin of trees and forests narrated not only tells of its origin of creation, but is also symbolic in describing the relationship link with humans during its initial stages. Trees and forests are regarded as part of human, and its existence is to fulfill the biological needs of humans, especially in terms of sustenance and clothing. This belief element is somewhat similar to the beliefs of the Ma' Betise' community, where the myth within this community illustrates how in the beginning of time plants originated from humans (Karim, 1981).

Although in the current context trees and plants seem to have different life patterns compared to humans, the relationship ties however still exists. As a part of life on earth, both are under the power of God. As humans continue to live under all sustenance blessings from God, trees and plants are also able to live as God has planned and decided everything, such as bringing down rain and all the other elements needed⁸. Therefore, the Semaq Beri believes forests have equal life status as humans. Such belief is not only based on the perception that forests originated from humans, but also based upon the nature of its life. Its life evolution is similar to humans; starting from the process of birth or germination, growth, maturity and eventual death.

A forest area is associated with a certain group of people. Various types of trees found within a forest area are considered similar to a human community comprising of various races as well as a range of ages. Like humans, some are still at the initial phases of growth while others are already in the maturity phase. The equality in life status with humans is indeed not only from a physical standpoint, but also from a spiritual standpoint. Various types of trees are believed to have their own spirits like humans (Hood, 1993), the only difference is in its nature. The spirits of trees are believed to be moderate in nature, while human spirits are interchangeable in nature. In certain situations it may be high while vice versa in other situations.

b) Significance of Forests

The natural environment including forests and biological diversity is a precious element in the sight of the local residents. As stated by previous researchers, the life of the Orang Asli community is largely dependent on the resources from the natural environment (Skeat and Blagden, 1906; Dentan, 1968; Karim, 1977; Endicott, 1979; Howell, 1982; 1984; Dentan, *et al.*, 1979; Lye, 2000). Such is the case among the Semaq Beri community. The forest has been a vital source of sustenance and daily necessities. This is even more apparent when referring to the daily activities carried out by the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua. Kuchikura (1986; 1988) who had made a study on the aforementioned villagers in 1978/1979 explains that at the time the forest was a primary source of sustenance to the local residents. The residents obtained at least three food components from the forest as well as its biodiversity. First, food sources from hunting activities. Second, food sources from rivers such as fishes, turtles and frogs. Third, food sources from various plants in the forest, covering a variety of tubers, vegetables and fruits. He furthermore explained in the overall context the functions of the forest is not

only essential as a source of food, but is also important as a source of providing clothing, building shelters, gathering materials for making various tools and as a source of livelihood.

The situation described by Kuchikura (1986; 1988) continues to exist until now. Forest exploitation is carried out continuously by community members for the same purpose. Thus, the closeness in terms of relationships and experience of local residents that have long been associated with these forests as a source of sustenance has engraved various tales and events. Among the stories highlighted are ones related to as how this particular environment has fulfilled daily needs. Among the stories that were told is as follows:

'Many things can be obtained from the forest. Food is aplenty, nothing needs to be bought, no cash or money needed. Whatever we desire, we go in search of it, and once found we simply take. If one feels like eating tubers, we go and dig the soil uphill... if we want to eat vegetables, we can collect fern shoots here. There are also many varieties of vegetables to be found in the vicinity... The same goes with meat. All kinds of animals roam here; all we have to do is choose which to be consumed... Apart from animals, the rivers found within this area are full of fishes... When the fruit season arrives there is even more food. Come to think of it the forest not only is abundance with food, but earning money is also easy. The forest actually stores money in the amount of millions.'

The story narrated presents a clear picture of forests and its biodiversity being a vital asset in the lives of the local residents. From the story it can also be concluded that the significance of forests in the lives of the local Orang Asli community can be classified into a number of categories. In the context of being a source of food and income, the categories are as in the Table 1.

Table 1: Categories of food and income sources from the forest.

No.	Category	Food / Income
1.	Source of carbohydrate	Wild tubers (In many varieties. There are at least 10 types of wild tubers that are often consumed by the Semaq Beri tribe as a source of food (Ramle, 1993).
2.	Source of vegetables	Consists of fern shoots and wild vegetables (<i>umbuk</i>). There are at least five types of <i>umbuk</i> consumed by the local residents.
3.	Source of protein	Consists of wild game meat and fishes. All animals and fishes can be consumed except those considered poisonous.
4.	Source of fruits	All types of fruits, except those considered poisonous.
5.	Source of income	Various materials that have market value. The Semaq Beri usually focuses on searching rattan, aloeswood, some wild game catches and medicine (herbs).

In addition, the significance of forests in other forms as mentioned by Kuchikura (1988) is still at a high level. Among others, forests as a source of raw materials to build house shelters, tools for daily activities as well as medicinal purposes. Based on these benefits the Semaq Beri community regard the forest as leading them to a more prosperous life, without being burdened with financial difficulties in obtaining daily necessities. Based on such functions the forest is associated with a bank, known as the 'Forest Bank' or in the local language '*Bank Beri*', in which vast wealth as sources of sustenance and livelihood is stored in it. The local residents can take or exploit this wealth in small quantities whenever needed. In other words they can carry out a variety of activities including search of rattan, aloeswood, and others either for their own needs or for sale. However this should be carried out at moderate rates and does not result in damage to the source.

c) **Safeguarding the Sustainability and Biodiversity of Forests:**

The awareness towards maintaining the sustainability of forests and its biodiversity among the Semaq Beri tribe exists due to a number of factors. Firstly, the realisation that it is a precious gift from the supernatural powers, and humans are responsible of safeguarding it to ensure the wellbeing of the present and future generations. Secondly, it is a heritage legacy of previous generations to be benefited by the next generation. Thirdly, the importance of forests towards maintaining continuous usage. It is on this basis that the Semaq Beri tribe possesses their own skills and strategies towards ensuring the sustainability of the forest and its biodiversity. Among the more prominent ways are the ones related to their approach towards the exploitation of forests. The proper order when taking yields from the forest is always taken into consideration to avoid the wrath of the supernatural powers. Hood (1995) explains that indigenous communities including the Orang Asli community will never simply amass the forest yields around them. It is only when in need of certain plants for medicinal purposes, an incantation will be recited to seek the permission from the powers that safeguard the world and thus will only be taken in the most lenient and gentle way possible (Hood, 1995).

This sequence of order when exploiting the forest produce is also a practice by the Semaq Beri tribe. Their experience in the exploitation of such resources show how it is performed in sequence, to abide to certain set rules until all that is undertaken does not cause damage or becomes a waste of resources. As mentioned by an informant:

'There are special ways when one desires to obtain something from the forest, mountains or rivers. If a plant is needed for medicational purposes, one must seek the permission from God and the spirit of the tree

itself. Similarly, if one plans to chop down a large tree, an incantation must be recited. Failing to do so may result in one encountering any forms of disaster, such as the likes of being struck down by felled trees'.

The explanation by the informant shows that the collecting of forest products should follow a certain order. Among those taken into consideration are; First, prior to taking any forest products either chopping down a tree or killing of animals for game must first seek the permission from the spirit of the element, and it is the *Semaq hala'* which is responsible for this. This step is necessary to avoid the wrath of the *Semaq hala'* and allow the task to be carried out safely. Instead one who is involved in carrying out such activities will be protected by the *Semaq hala'* from any types of disasters such as being struck by a falling tree, etc. Besides that, consent from this spirit is furthermore needed in ensuring all that is undertaken becomes more successful and blessed. For example, the activities of collecting plants for medicinal purposes. The plant taken for such a purpose becomes more nutritious when it has the blessings of the spirits. Second, related undertakings shall not be carried out in a haste or hurry. Such forms of actions are said to indicate sheer greed and is unappealing to the *Semaq hala'*.

Such orders are not only practiced on a small scale when obtaining materials from the forest but are also practiced when clearing forest lands involving large areas such as opening of plantation farms. Permission from the *Semaq hala'* is vital before undertaking of any forms of activities which causes damage to the forest. Indeed, community members are allowed to clear large forest lands for agricultural and other purposes, as long as they seek the consent of the *Semaq hala'*. In the context of heritage, the Semaq Beri regards the forest as a valuable ancestral heritage. Such belief elements are actually in line with the beliefs of the Orang Asli of the Ma'Betise' tribe (Karim, 1977) and Batek tribe (Endicott, 1979). Based on such an ideology the forests and its biodiversity contained therein is always safeguarded, not only by the community but also by the ancestral spirits known as the *Semaq hala'*. Its purpose is to maintain the wellbeing of forests and function well in fulfilling human needs.

Thus, although forests were created for human benefit but destruction of it is totally forbidden. As in the beliefs of the Ma'Betise' community (Karim, 1977; 1981), its use must be at a moderate level. All activities related to taking forest products is undertaken moderately and is based upon consideration regarding the needs of future generations. In search of rattan for instance, the amount of rattan taken from a clump found is not taken all. A portion is left untouched on the principle that rattan will not face extinction and such an act will enable it to grow for future use. Any activities that are haste and greedy in nature which eventually brings destruction to an element will incur the wrath of the supernatural powers and superhuman beings such as the *Semaq hala'*. As a result humans will likely face punishment in various forms of disasters such as floods, storms, long droughts, etc. which leads to human distress and death.

The Semaq Beri tribe believes that not all the measures taken by them are practiced by other communities, especially the outside communities. Thus they see this heritage treasure facing the process of destruction. Forests, rivers and mountains are becoming increasingly threatened by the development process taking place nationwide. As days go by, the forest area is becoming increasingly narrower due to the clearing of lands for agriculture and many other purposes. Similarly, many rivers are being polluted, causing most of the fish and various other wildlife to become extinct. These threats are often associated with the attitudes of outside communities that do not adhere to the set order and are haste in exploiting these resources. The local residents see this as an act of encroachment and betrayal to their rights.

Conclusion:

The significance of forests and its biodiversity in the context of universal human life is clearly understood by all parties. Statements by scientists generally confirm that forests are an essential component of the environment either to meet the biological needs of humans as well as the economic and social needs. For the Semaq Beri tribe, forests have its own distinctive significance in their context of social systems. It is a source of daily necessities, basis to social activities and is related to their belief systems.

Forests and its biodiversity is regarded as a valuable gift from the supernatural powers as well as a heritage treasure which benefits must be enjoyed continuously from one generation to the other. Thus, actions taken in preserving its sustainability are implemented through the appreciation of a single norm system among the community members. Each and every member is educated that safeguarding the sustainability of forests is a trust from the supernatural powers. Methods and measures in deforestation are based upon the principle of obedience and appreciation towards this gift by the supernatural powers.

Although the attitudes and practices of the Semaq Beri tribe in ensuring the sustainability of forests is not something of a scientific nature, their knowledge and practices within this context indicates high levels of moral aspects regarding their relationship with the natural environment especially forests and its biodiversity. Moderation in exploiting forest products certainly has a positive impact towards the sustainability of forests and its biodiversity. Such an attitude is indeed in line with the public aspirations in forest conservation for various purposes related to universal interests.

Notes:

¹The total number of Orang Asli villages in Peninsula Malaysia is 880. 37.17% are located in remote areas, 61.45% in outskirts areas of towns, and only 1.38% in town areas (Zainal Abidin, 2004).

²There are three Orang Asli groups in Malaysia, namely the Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Malays. Each group consists of six tribes. The Negrito consists of the Kintak, Kensiu, Jahai, Medrik, Batek and Lanoh tribes. While the Senoi consists of the Semai, Temiar, Jah-het, Semaq Beri, Ma'Betise', and Chewong tribes. The Proto-Malays consist of the Temuan, Jakun, Semelai, Orang Seletar, Orang Kuala and Orang Kanaq tribes (Carey, 1976).

³Apart from the state of Terengganu, the Semaq Beri tribe can also be found in the states of Pahang and Kelantan.

⁴According to the beliefs of the Semaq Beri tribe, human beings were the first life form created by the supernatural powers after the existence of the world (Ramle, 1993).

⁵God refers to the supernatural powers. In the belief system of the Semaq Beri tribe in Kampung Sungai Berua the supernatural powers consists of *Hala' Asal*, *Semaq Hala'* and *Karei*. *Asal* is the subject of supreme power while *Semaq Hala'* is a reference to the spirits of deceased and living shamans. The roles of *Semaq Hala'* are as the inter-connecting mediums between humans and the *Hala' Asal*. *Karei* on the other hand assists *Hala' Asal* in guarding life movements in the universe, including humans and all life forms on earth (Endicott, 1979; Ramle, 1993).

⁶The first version tells the story as such: 'Once there were many humans, finding food was scarce. God commanded His servants to come down to earth to witness the fate of humans. Upon witnessing this predicament, the servants of God chose a part of humans and turned them into trees. In the beginning there were not many, but in time the numbers grew abundantly and turned into thick forests. Once there were forests, chances to find food also existed. Various types of fruit trees grew and became means of sustenance. Besides fruit trees, there were also other sorts of trees that we could take its yield for trading purposes, as a source of livelihood. For example, we usually collect rattan and aloeswood'.

⁷The second version tells the story as such: 'There was once an event that led to the creation of trees. As God witnessed the predicament of humans in finding food, he commanded a man to kill his own brother and chop the flesh to pieces. The minced human flesh was scattered around on the ground. With the will of God, trees started growing at the spot where the human flesh was scattered. Some turned into fruit trees, such as *nekian* (rambutan), *derian* (durian), mango and other sorts of trees while the rest turned into other than fruit trees. The trees continued to propagate in large numbers and resulted in the creation of thick forests'.

⁸As one informant pointed out, 'All trees alive are under the will of God. Trees can grow, live from sapling till maturity and eventually death, all under the care of God, and not under the will of humans. If God commands the tree to die, then death it is, and if God desires it to live, then it will live on. God brings down rain in order for trees to live and be fertile. Such is the case of humans; God creates wind that continues to prevail for human life, to rejuvenate all (humans). All is under the power of God'.

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