

Two Window and One Rivers The Possibility of Dayak Meratus People in Capitalist Society

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Abstract

Sometimes, social science started from wanderers. They left footsteps in the areas they have visited, bequeathed stories that have not been heard by outsiders. They recorded various occurrences that were subsequently recognized and enjoyed by researchers, observers, scientists and people in general. The footprint in the form of writings was referred to as scholarly reports, while the history of their development was called philology. This paper was part of the ethnographic in-field study of Loksado people conducted in February 2014 to November 2016. The discussion focused on how social sciences wandered in the location of the study, which was Dayak Meratus land in South Kalimantan and then described the indigeneous knowledge of the local people published in textbooks, journals and other scholarly publications. And then, the world of sciences recognized Dayak Meratus people as the concept of cultivating society, customary people, Balian ceremony and Dayak ethnomedicine. It was expected that the short description of the in-field study in Kalimantan could contribute to the development of social sciences in Indonesia

Key words: Social Change and Dayak Meratus.

INTRODUCTION

Who was Dayak Meratus? It has been being the component of identity still debatable. The label Dayak Meratus was given to Dayak people living in the areas of Meratus Mountains. The general label used by Banjarese for their geographic neighbor was *Bubuhan* referring to the location in which they lived and their sociological relationship.

Dutch called those living around Meratus Mountains Mountain People (*orang bukit*). Anna Tsing (1995) introduced the label Meratus. She chose the label Meratus that in one hand referred to Dayak people living around Meratus Mountains, while in other hand it had its root in the word *Ratus* or hundreds referring to the diversity of people. According to Tsing, the label was anti-ethnic label for a group of people who were different from each other. For Tsing the label Mountain people had pejorative meaning that the people were uncivilized.

It was also the case of the label isolated tribes revering to the ethnic group living in inland areas. Tsing described her observation from September 1979 to August 1980 and then in several months of 1986 in Juhu village of Batang Alai subdistrict. Tsing's study was then published in a popular book *In the Realm of the diamond Queen* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995). The book has been translated by Yayasan Obor Indonesia into Indonesian *Di Bawah Bayang-bayang Ratu Intan* (Jakarta, 2000).

In 2000s the label Dayak Meratus for almost all of the observers and researchers became the identity of the people living in the area along with their custom and culture. Meratus people have lived for generations in the forest of Meratus Mountains stretching from south areas of South Kalimantan province to East Kalimantan and west areas of West Kalimantan and west areas of Central Kalimantan. They lived in rural areas and a part of them still lived communally in customary building.

The customary building was a big square house with several small spaces around kitchen, dining room and bedroom for girls. Each customary building was inhabited by 10 to 30 household heads.

Meratus people were hard, strong and tough workers. They used the most of their time to work in non-irrigated land, forest and garden. Since June to September they were busy opening forest and prepared non-irrigated land. They cut down trees (*batabas*), drying logs (*malarang*) and burning the remainder of the logging materials (*manyalukut*). In October to November they dibbled rice and then weeded in December to January. When the rice has grown high enough they began to protect the land against diseases such as *bangkui*, a kind of monkey, monkey and birds. In March to May they harvest the rice (*bakatom*) and back to the first phase of the cycle of preparing the non-irrigated land in June.

All this time it was rarely that they failed in harvesting their crops because of plant diseases or because of climatic causal factors. They had very good indigeneous knowledge in selecting arable land, predicting climate, preventing plant diseases and storing the harvest results. They only opened the forest that they have left for 8-12 years when the soil has had enough humus content as indicated by the black color of the land they called *Barkat*. Starting cultivation they followed astronomic guidance *Karantika* that was highly accurate in predicting wet season. They grew various species of flowers and sorghum such as *hanjalai* as disease bait.

Living in isolated areas in Meratus Mountains, Meratus people lived close to nature. The forest of Meratus Mountains was well-preserved. Additionally, they still strongly upheld traditions and culture in their effort to adapt to natural environment. There were taboos in addition to customary ceremonies and tradition in the culture of Meratus people.

Loksado and Meratus were very unique and exotic regions. Each of the living activities was accompanied by both individual and communal rituals. The communal building in which they lived became the place for ceremonies almost throughout the year. One of their rituals was *Aruh* in addition to various customary rituals related to local knowledge and local wisdom of the local people of Loksado and the villagers of some other kampongs in Meratus.

Method:

This research was part of an ethnographic study of Loksado people conducted in February 2014 to November 2016. The main location of the study was Loksado kampung with the primary informants of customary chief *Damang* and the chairman of the association of Dayak Meratus and five household heads of Dayak Meratus as secondary informants. It was expected that the use of James Spradley's participant observation method could give accurate and in-depth information. The focus of the study was indigenous knowledge. The indigenous knowledge was qualitatively described as the science that the indigenous people developed independent of Western science. "If we understood 'indigenous' to relate to people who had a long-standing and complex relationship with a local area and 'science', it meant that we used a systematic approach to acquire knowledge of the natural world and then indigenous science was the process in which the indigenous people built their empirical knowledge of their natural environment. As the case of Western science, indigenous science was the practical application of theories of knowledge of the nature of the world and the indigenous people incorporated Western scientific knowledge to their practices."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The population of Meratus people in Loksado kampung was 7,792 individuals. They were homogeneous people. There were balanced numbers of Banjarese and Dayak people. There were three religions embraced by the people. They were Islam, Christian and Balian. There were 490 (48.4%) Christian, 408 (40.1%) Moslems and 11.5% Balian. The composition was unique in which Islam and Christian were balanced and Kaharingan had significant number of followers. Compared to other villages in Loksado subdistrict, Loksado village was situated in the center of the subdistrict and represented the most heterogeneous village with almost the same composition.

Meratus people were a customary community living in Meratus Mountains who was in the past well-known as Dayak Bukit. Dayak Meratus lived along with sub-Dayak ethnics living around Meratus Mountains. The sub-Dayak Meratus was classified on the basis of settlement areas, language and belief into *Bubuhan*. The *Bubuhan* classification was made on the basis of the settlement area, the category and the world technology they owned.

The Category of Banjarese Malay	Settlement Area	The Category of Dayak Meratus	World Technology
Bubuhan	Hinas Kiwa	Dayak Hinas	Gadget
Bubuhan	Loksado	Dayak Loksado	Mobile phone
Bubuhan	Juhu	Dayak Juhu	Laptop
Bubuhan	Halong	Dayak Halong	Tablet
Bubuhan	Deyah	Dayak Deyah	Handphone Android
Bubuhan	Labuhan	Dayak Labuhan	Iphone
Bubuhan	Pitap	Dayak Pitap	Internet Online
Bubuhan	Sampanahan	Dayak Sampanahan	Parabole

There was a controversy of the origin of Dayak Meratus. According to Tjilik Riwut (1979) Dayak Meratus belonged to the group of Dayak Ngaju. Idwar Saleh (1984) suggested that Dayak Meratus were the native people of Meratus Mountains. Some said that they used to live in coastal areas and alongside Tabalong River, but the presence of Malay immigrants in 400-500 M the native people marginalized to the mountaineous areas. The Dayak Meratus had their own culture and belief called Balian.

The identification of the existing groups was based on village or river names and it related to the organization of the local people called *bubuhan*. *Bubuhan* was a group of *umbun-umbun* representing nuclear family that consisted of mother, father, girls and sons. They lived in the chambers of the customary building. The customary building was a big house of the dimension of 30 meters of length and 10-15 meters of width. The central part of the building was used as the space for customary ceremonies. The *bubuhan* was organized on genealogy or territorial similarity. In the areas in which there were more heterogeneous inhabitants because of the mixing of the local people and the new comers, the *bubuhan* was established on territorial basis only. The territory of Loksado was the one with the heterogeneous inhabitants (Radam, 2001: 121-124).

The term *Bubuhan* was influenced by the social organization of the period of Banjar Kingdom. According Alfani Daud (1997) *Bubuhan* in traditional Banjarese represented "kinship group till cousin level along with husbands and sometimes wives. It meant that the *Bubuhan* in Banjarese society was familial relationship-based group. Furthermore, he asserted that the *Bubuhan* was identified as the name of village or river, but as the name of the figure in the family.

Balian Religion:

Meratus people in Loksado had familial belief for generations. The belief originated from the reading and the life experience related to nature and universe. Additionally, the belief was also influenced by the belief found in the territory where they lived, Central Kalimantan. Though Kaharingan belief had the sacred book Panaturan, Loksado people depended more on the figure of customary ceremony leader, including burial ceremony and the ceremony for the purpose of therapy. The main figure in the organization of the ceremonies was known as Balian.

The belief of Maratus people might be considered as the belief of *Huma* people and related to the respect of sacred rice manifested in rituals and ceremonies.

Meratus people in Loksado had the belief and religious rites led by *Balian*. The practice of the *Balian* seemed to be parallel to what was called *Shaman* in western religious terminology. Radam (2001) found that the word *Balian* for Maratus people had broad meaning. *Balian* in *Balian* religion might have various meanings. It could be the name of a belief or the people who had the belief, taught it along with the method of continuously taking care and maintaining something. Based on the number of its followers, the procedure of the ceremonies and its development, *Balian* could be categorized as religion.

Considering the last term, *mambalianipadi* or *mambaliani* the sick one meant to take care of and to maintain the rice or to traditionally treat the sick one.

It was forbidden for Meratus people to name God because it was taboo. They believe in God named *Ilah* (the creator) and His supernatural power.

In addition to the belief in God, they also recognize a number of God names that should be worshiped and respected such as (1) predecessor's spirit *Datu-Nini*, (2) the spirits that were still in other world surrounding the living areas (*Pidara*) and (3) the spirits of the meritorious rulers *Kariau* and also the spirit of the ruler and the keeper of forest, non-irrigated land, trees, rivers, animals and so on.

Earth was believed as mother *Indung-Pangasihani*, sky as ruling father *Bapak Kuwasa*, self as *Limbagan* with four brothers *Dangsanak Ampat* that were good and bad character and influenced human being. Rice was believed as the fruit of sky, fruit of the year, fruit of trees, while seasonal flowers were called *Diyang*.

Meratus people in Loksado generally believed in the existence of 3 main *Ilah*: *Suwara* that created universe, first human, and seven protecting plants; *Nining Bahatara* that regulated livelihood and good fortune, and human faith; and *Sangkawanang* that gave authority to rice.

Balian religion had religious leader called *Balian* who was responsible for the organization of all of the aspects of the rituals in the life of Meratus people. *Balian* had different levels: *Guru Jaya* who had the authority to lead all of the ceremonies, was traditional religious teacher and also shaman in addition to the uniting symbol of *Bubuhan*; *Balian Tuha* who had the authority to lead religious and traditional ceremonies with stronger influence in customary life because

Balian Tuha was the pioneer of *Guru Jaya*; *Balian Tengah* and *Balian Anum* who could play the role of *Guru Jaya* and *Balian Tuha* if necessary because he was still in the learning process.

All of the aspects of the ceremonies were inseparable of *Tandik* or *Batandik* and *Karasukan* (in-trance) dances assisted by *Juru Patati* responsible for answering questions, giving explanation and translating the willingness of *Balian* during *Karasukan*. In *Balian* ceremony, drum player played an important role in ceremony because he or she should follow the movement of *Ilah* in playing his or her drum as the communication instrument with the *Ilah* in the ceremony. The description of the Maratus people was consistent with the category of the belief of Maratus people in Loksado kampung as *Balian* religion.

Indigenous Knowledge:

Dayak Loksado kampung was situated in the fores of Meratus Mountains for generations, which stretched from south areas of South Kalimantan province to East Kalimantan and west areas of West Kalimantan and west areas of Central Kalimantan. They lived in rural areas and a part of them still lived communally in customary building. The customary building was a big square house with several small spaces around kitchen, dining room and bedroom for girls. Each customary building was inhabited by 10 to 30 household heads.

The study by Achmad Rafiq Muchlison (2016, 2017) found that Meratus people were hard, strong and tough workers. They used the most of their time to work in non-irrigated land, forest and garden. Since June to September they were busy opening forest and prepared non-irrigated land. They cut down trees (*batabas*), drying logs (*malarang*) and burning the remainder of the logging materials (*manyalukui*). In October to November they dibbled rice and then weeded in December to January. When the rice has grown high enough they began to protect the land against diseases such as *bangkui*, a kind of monkey, monkey and birds. In March to May they harvest the rice (*bakatam*) and back to the first phase of the cycle of preparing the non-irrigated land in June.

The social, cultural and economical landscape of the location of the study showed that all this time it was rarely that they failed in harvesting their crops because of plant diseases or because of climatic causal factors.

They had very good indigenous knowledge in selecting arable land, predicting climate, preventing plant diseases and storing the harvest results. They only opened the forest that they have left for 8-12 years when the soil has had enough humus content as indicated by the black color of the land they called *Barkat*. Starting cultivation they followed astronomic guidance *Karantika* that was highly accurate in predicting wet season. They grew various species of flowers and sorghum such as *hanjalai* as disease bait.

The Social and Cultural Change in Meratus Foothills:

Living in isolated areas in Meratus Mountains, Meratus people lived close to nature. The forest of Meratus Mountains was well-preserved. Additionally, they still strongly upheld traditions and culture in their effort to adapt to natural environment. There were taboos in addition to customary ceremonies and tradition in the culture of Meratus people.

Loksado and Meratus were very unique and exotic regions. Each of the living activities was accompanied by both individual and communal rituals. The communal building in which they lived became the place for ceremonies almost throughout the year. One of their rituals was *Aruh* in addition to various customary rituals related to local knowledge and local wisdom of the local people of Loksado and the villagers of some other kampongs in Meratus.

Each of the phases in processing non-irrigated land was accompanied by both individual (*Salamatan*) rituals and communal (*Aruh*) rituals. Almost throughout the year they regularly organized various rituals. One of the rituals was *Aruh Basambu Umang* and *ArungMahanyari Banih, Bamamang* and *Batandik* and also the rituals in the *Aruh*. It was the rituals that differed Meratus people from other ethnics in Meratus Mountains.

There was a taboo for Maratus people to consume newly harvested rice if there was still rice available from the last harvest. It was also taboo for them to sell the rice that there were those who still had the rice from the last 5-6 years harvest. The harvesting results of the non-irrigated land were stored in rice barns (*lulung*) located in some *lampau* around customary building in which they lived. The food reserve would not deplete even if they failed in three respective harvests.

Dayak Loksado people had different views and understanding of world and life experience from those of other people. They still used traditional metric units for volume that was part of their culture and they used the metric units for their land and in constructing traditional houses such as *Gantang, Lanjung, Lulung, Kampil* and so on that were different from the standard metric units of volume, content and quantity found in mathematics and physics. It was also the case in determining good days to do certain job such as in starting to build a house, in cultivating rice, in cutting down trees and in determining *Bulan Penuh, Bulan Mati* and *Bintang*. Therefore, the indigenous science was still well-preserved and used among Dayak people.

It seemed that the development of science in Eastern society (non-Western) was different from the development of the science in Western society, including the science of human and the essence of human and also the thinking method of the surrounding nature. Zawawi Ibrahim and Noor Shah M. S. (2012) described central and peripheral issues, while the production of social sciences was very complex and involved multiple layers. Historically, Western imperialism was not only indicative of economic and political domination, but also the hegemony of knowledge at global level. The relationship between power and knowledge remained in postcolonial global era. The production of social sciences, for example, was more identified as the center than the periphery.

In the very long period of time the periphery has been reduced to the position of acceptors and the consumers of theoretical knowledge and not considered as the initiators or the producers. The periphery served only as the laboratory rich of empirical data for Western social scientists to conduct their researches and studies and finally to create new theories or merely involved those in the periphery in theoretical discourse.

Therefore, it was necessary for indigenous projects to make use of story telling as the decolonization of the colonial methodology in postmodernist ethnography (see Fontana, 1994). The study by Zawawi (1998) of Penans ethnics in East Malaysia dealing with the stories James Brooks' journey from Long Lama in Ulu Baram, Sarawak empowered indigenous perspective of deterritorialization and uncovered the representation of indigenous ideas of place, space and territory. Also, using the same methodology Zawawi could identify and articulate 'indigenous submissiveness discourse' against the existing ideology of orientalization process, for example, in the project of isolated ethnics.

Conclusion:

All this time the cultivators in Meratus Mountains with their local wisdom were able to maintain their food security through various cultural institutions such as the taboo to sell paddy, the taboo to consume the newly harvested paddy if there was still paddy available from the last harvest and reliable traditional storing technology.

Dayak Loksado people had very good local knowledge of cultivating method, maintaining and improving their life in nature. They had their own scientific method to store paddy in *Lulung* or rice barns. Their food availability was warranted by their ability to establish the harmony of land fertility and human wisdom.

So far, the threat of the food availability came from government policy that has made them powerless. It was the contradiction between indigenous science and Western science. The instinct of living things in the ecosystem to survive played an important role not only for individual being, but also for collective beings as group. In scientific terminology of ecological science there was the term *altruism* as the manifestation of self sacrifice for survival and it became the part of the challenge in the development of social sciences in Indonesia.

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