

PRESERVING LOCAL (INDONESIAN) WISDOM THROUGH FOLKLORE: AN ANALYSIS OF REJANG TRIBE'S SUPERSTITIONS AND GAMES

REKO SERASI

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Bengkulu, Indonesia
email: reko.serasi@iainbengkulu.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Local wisdom, in recent years, is a famous term promoted by many groups - academic and non-academic groups; government and non-government institutions. This paper intends to uncover the local wisdom that exists in two of folklore branches, superstitions and games. They are spread in the society especially in Rejang tribe, a tribe in Bengkulu province, Indonesia. The data were obtained from the interview with the locals (informants) and from the writer's own knowledge since the writer is originally from Rejang tribe. The superstitions and games used as data in this paper are those performed daily by the locals in their area. All of the data are analyzed by applying the socio-cultural approach. From the analysis, the result shows that the locals especially the older people tend to use the superstitions to convey and pass the local wisdom to their children or descendants. Moreover, it is also applied in giving warning to certain condition occurred in their life. In addition, the games that are usually played by the children teach them good things for their life. Regarding to the result of the analysis, it can be concluded that superstitions and games, part of folklore, are noble things containing high-valued local wisdom. They need to be passed, preserved and transferred from generation to generation through many ways – written, oral, or combination of oral and written form.

Key words: *Local Wisdom, Rejang Tribe, Folklore, Indonesia.*

Background

Lately, it is hard to find children gathering and playing in the yard or in the field cheerfully with their friend. In contrast, it is an easy thing to find the children who are busy with their favorite sophisticated gadgets such as iPad, up to date cellular phone, play station, and so on. Due to the development of the technology and society's demand of the modern equipment and product, many producers of these products are creating and launching their new products with the latest and complete program and function. This situation will fulfill the demands of the "modern" society and complete their life. On the other hand, the unstoppable coming of the products has started to dismiss the existence of the folklore in general from the society.

Dananjaya in his book explains that folklore is a collective culture passed on from generation to generation in many forms (2002: 1-2). Today, the effect of the latest development in the society as explained in the previous paragraph has shown its result because folklore as a part of the daily social life has been started to be forgotten by the society especially by the young generations. For instance, it is a scarce thing to see a group of children playing jump rope or hide and seek but it is a common sight to watch slothful children with joystick in their hands in front of television and inattentive children with their iPad or cell phone.

In the paragraph above, I have tried to explain the effect of the technology development toward the folklore in the society. That explanation sounds as if I am in the opposite side of this condition. I am not bothered by the development of the technology at all. As the writer, I just want to awake our awareness toward this pitiful problem because the thing that takes my intention is the real condition in the society nowadays in treating folklore. It seems that our younger generations and we tend to forget and leave the folklore (games, superstition, riddle, etc) that has been vested for centuries in our society. Moreover, it directs the young generation to consider that those traditional things are peculiar and old-fashioned entity. For example: some expression such as "Ah kuno....!" or "Helloooo...ini 2014 kaleee...!" in teenagers community have become usual expression in responding the folklore. This expression shows that talking or discussing something related to folklore is quaint matter.

Bronner in his book explains that folklore is rich and meaningful source for the study of cognition and values (2007: xi-xii). It emphasizes that folklore provide a broad and abundant things that can be learned in living this live. In other words, folklore consists of many (moral)

values and wisdoms teaching us good things. Therefore, it is a good option if we make efforts to re-popularize, re-teach and preserve the folklore in our society.

Folklore is a broad scope to be discussed. It also has many genres and many types – folktales, legends, folksongs, riddles, superstitions, myths and many more. In general, folklore has various form based on its type and Brunvard defines folklore into three main branches: Verbal Folklore, Partly Verbal Folklore and Non-verbal Folklore (Dananjaya, 2002: 21). Regarding this condition, the writer will only focus on superstitions and games in this paper in which these two types of folklore included in verbal and partly-verbal folklore.

The superstitions and games discussed in this paper belong to one of tribes in Sumatra Island, Rejang tribe. The writer acquires the data from the direct interview and discussion with the informants on Sunday, January 12 - 14, 2014. As a tribe attributed with many kinds of tangible and intangible heritages, cultural and social, socio-cultural approach will be applied in analyzing the superstitions and games as the data in this paper. It is a fact that folklore is created altogether with the socio-cultural history; both are inseparable (Endraswara, 2008). Thus, this approach is used in order to find out a better comprehension in dealing with a society and its cultural and literary products.

Rejang Tribes at Glance

The Rejang tribe is the tribe with the biggest population in Bengkulu province. It consists of four main groups (*Empat Petulai Rejang*) – *Jurukalang*, *Bermani*, *Selupu*, and *Tubei*. In the past, these people were nomad and survived from what nature offers them. Then, they started to stay permanently in one place when a leader, a person called *Ajai* who is chosen collectively by the member of the tribe, ruled them. At that time, they did farming, made social rules and governmental institution. They were used to be called as *Ranah Sekalawi* or *Pinang Belapis* (Behind the hill society).

Based on the story in the society, at the time of *Ajai*, there were four monks coming from *Majapahit*. Later on, these monks were crowned as the leader in four different areas because of their good attitude, behavior, knowledge and other good deeds. They were known as Biku Sepanjang Jiwo, Biku Bembo, Biku Bejenggo, and Biku Bermano. From that moment, culture of Rejang tribe were started to be known and they also started the literate time in which they create their own alphabets known as *Kaganga*.

Regarding the artifacts explaining about this tribe such as John Marsden's writing, England Resident in Lais (1775-1779) and J.L.M Swaab's writing, Dutch Leader in Lais (1910-1915), it can be concluded that the Rejang tribe already has and run a advanced social custom (Source: Sujarwo and Dinpar Rejang Lebong).

Superstition as instrument to preserve and pass the local wisdom in Rejang tribe

Lain lubuk lain ikan; lain padang lain belalang.

The writer likes to cite one of the proverbs in Bahasa Indonesia to show that every people or group of people has their own way to do certain thing and principles. This paper is focus on analyzing the data, superstitions, attained from Rejang tribe in Bengkulu yet the writer realize that Indonesia consists of many tribes living all over a huge archipelago.

Rejang tribe has many kinds of folklore such as games, folksongs, riddles, superstition and so on. "All of them are still practiced by the people but not as intensive as in the past", Arbisah said. This short informative sentence from one of the elder man in Rejang tribe pictures the existence of folklore in this area. The condition of folklore has been faded away since the modernity infects the society and change their way of life and mindset. As the individual experienced the condition in Rejang tribe, the writer can see great differences between the recent condition in this area with the past (around 16 years ago) especially about the existence of folklore.

Regarding the superstition, 16 years ago, it was a common thing for parent or elder people to say something or warn someone else with superstitions. Hearing parents and elder people teach and give warning or advice using the superstitions was daily habits and attribute in Rejang tribe. It could be in the house, in the field, jungle, and other places. The Rejang tribe had the superstitions related to many things and about many cases. The following list of superstition is some of the superstitions recorded from the informants.

1. *Jibeak lalau idong tun mukmei bilai amen neak kebun, be nmuk imeu* (if you having lunch in a rice field, do not go out otherwise you will get a bad luck). This superstition is

usually expressed by parents to their children. It is such as a warning for the children to stay and to finish their meals before going out from the hut. Actually, it teaches the children about the togetherness and respect among the member of the family. Furthermore, this superstition conveys a good message about giving thank for the blessing from the God.

2. *Jibeak galok cuguk neak ulau nea* (do not sit in front of the stairs because it will invite a bad luck). Since the common architecture of the house of the society in the past that has stairs, older people like to warn the other with this superstition. It seems that someone is giving warning to others. The deeper intention of this superstition is as a human being we should not block others way in this life or never be an obstacle for others.
3. *Jibeak gmatung pane neak ponok dumai areane imeu moi ponok* (do not hang on basket – *beronang*; a traditional basket made from bamboo – on the hut's wall because it will invite tiger to come to the hut. Regarding mostly of the Rejang people are farmer. This superstition is quite popular in the society. When the writer had a discussion with the informants, they explained that it just want to remind us about being diligent in working and never let the basket empty.
4. *Amen idong tnei lai coa buliak kisit ngen cabe* (when someone is pregnant, she should not be stingy about chili). It teaches us about being generous in this life. moreover, it tends to be expressed to pregnant women because people believe that it will affect the baby.
5. *Jibeak mnet bajau neak awok* (do not sew the torn clothes while wearing it). This superstition conveys a lesson of life. We should not treat ourselves pitifully and we never put ourselves in danger.

From the explanation above, it indicates that superstitions played important roles in the past as they were practiced regularly in the daily life of the society, Rejang tribe. They shaped the personality of the individual in the society through their implicit meanings. Besides, it also pictures that these superstition appeared and matched with the condition of the society. This fact confirms that the culture is the thing that could not be separated with the development and condition of the society.

Traditional games as social and moral (soft skill) teaching for children

Games and children are two inseparable things since it is a nature for children to play and have fun in their phase of life. Bahari explains that childhood is the time for playing. Playing is a very important learning activity to children and it is also useful for their development. By playing, children can get fresh mind. Through playing, their energy can be channeled positively. Moreover, they play games that can foster positive character and behavior in them (2013: 5). It is also undeniable fact that in this phase of life, the children is also well known as the aping age. It indicates that it is the time for them to learn many things in their early phase of their life. Learning process may be gotten by the children at school but it will not be complete since soft skill sometime are taught by the social interaction in the society or their surrounding environment. Regarding the children, their interaction with their friends daily is the best place to gain it. Cooper explains that environment affects the creation process of someone and stimulates authentic learning (2000: 26-27). It stresses that environment is a crucial aspect in children personal development. The writer tries to explain the importance of the environment because the games played by the children have strong relation with the environment. Furthermore, the type and atmosphere of the environment decide the type of the games played by the children.

It is a common fact that children tend to play game when they gather with their friends. Nowadays, children are familiar with the sophisticated gadgets as their games. These sophisticated things tend to be made for personal purpose and played solo. Even though it needs a partner, it is just a limited number of people for instance Play Station. Thus, this kind of game will not give a soft skill learning except a personal bliss since the player only sit down in front of the screen with his/her joystick alone. Furthermore, it also shapes the process of personal alienating of the children and burdens their social interaction in which children need social interaction for it can stimulate their social sense and personal development.

In contrast, different offers can be found in traditional games. When the modern gadgets with their sophisticated features and included games offer only a personal pleasure, traditional games provide plus values. Since traditional games are likely to be played in group or together with many people, they will offer many things to be learned by the players for example how to work

in team or build a good communication with others. This aspect of games bestows the plus values and differentiates them from the modern ones. The following games not only picture the pleasure of the game but also teach a good lesson to the children who played them. The following list of games are the traditional games that used to be played by the children two decades ago in Rejang tribe are in Bengkulu, Indonesia.

1. *Mkot ubai* (potatoes harvest time). This is a fun game that is usually played by children after the twilight. Some children will make a chain of people where is the “chief”, a child who is considered strong enough, puts his hands together as if he/she was hugging a pillar. Then, the other children hug him/her tightly while there is a child pretends to be a farmer who wants to yank out the potatoes. This game teaches the children to work together and believe to their friends. Furthermore, it teaches them that human beings are social creatures who are connected one another.
2. *Ceu cet* is a game where we have to make certain form from some boxes, usually, on the ground. The players also need a flat stone to mark the position of the player from the first box until the last one or the mountain or final stage. The player must throw the flat stone and go through the boxes continuously until the end. The essential of this game is teaching the player about the life. In this life, we have to pass many steps, obstacles and tests. Furthermore, it teaches implicitly that success can be reached through a process.
3. *Lelupat*, it is usually called as jump rope. This game need a long rope but the rope in this game are usually made by the children by webbing the rubber bracelet. There will be two players holding each end of the rubber chain and the other members of group will make efforts to jump over this rope without making any contact with the rope. The first height of the rope is on knee and it rises gradually until the highest position, the holders raise their hand to position the rope. Profoundly, *Lelupat* shows that reaching our dream needs strong efforts. Another message imparted by this game is when we want to start our efforts to reach our dream or success, we have to start it from the beginning or simple thing then it will increase steadily until the top.
4. *Ya o ma o ma* is a game where there are two groups consist of several people. In this game, the players are singing a song while they are moving forward and backward in harmony. The song itself narrates the condition of the group – they are in deficient condition and need help. The other group will help them based on their request. In other hand, we will be indigent and lost our entire member if we do not have a good strategy. Actually, this game imparts one of exalted teaching in life, helping other is a good deed but we have to consider our own condition for our own good.

From the explanation about the games above, it is unblemished that games, part of folklore, have high value teaching implicitly. The values are transmitted to the players, children, in a fun ways yet it needs their awareness to catch it. In fact, these games are informal place to study an entity needed in life. For instance, the children learn how to work in-group since the games are played together with their friend and this teaching will be very important for them when they grown up and involved in work field that needs teamwork. Furthermore, they also acquire the skill how to understand someone’s behavior through their daily interface when they are playing with their friends e.g. children can reckon his/her friends are good or not, honest or liar, or event tricky ones. Considering these points, it is necessary that the society, the generation who experienced the games and known the games, to re-introduce these games to the gadget goers children. Moreover, this act can save these games from extinction.

The Current Destiny of Folklore

In my background and analysis above, I have explained the condition of folklore in the society lately. It cannot be refuted that folklore are dying. Modernization that brings its sophisticated attributes gives tremendous influences toward the existence of folklore among the society, especially among the young generations. Moving back to two decades ago, it was a common horizon finding groups of children were playing together in a yard or field. They laughed freely and made interaction among them with their own ways. As an individual who experienced that wonderful moment, I thank God for giving my friends and me such a good and priceless time in the past. I said so because I can hardly find the moment as mine now among the children in my hometown. Today, children are familiar with the *PS* or *PSP* and they enjoy playing with that electronic friend lonely. It is more exciting for them rather than playing one of the traditional games. So far, it is the fact that happens in our surrounding, Rejang tribe area, Indonesia. The

example given above is the example taken from an outlying place in Indonesia. It can be imagined that a remote area is almost totally influenced by the modernization and it eradicates the high-valued superstitions and traditional games consisting the local wisdom. It can be a directive point to determine the condition in the city where everything is available. It must be worse than in the remote area. In term of superstition, the “modern” people like to think rationally or think in “modern” way. Everything must be logical. “Don’t believe in it or That’s out of my mind” are the common response when they hear a superstition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the superstitions and games, folklore, consist of high-value teachings and local wisdom of the certain group of people. Indonesians’ folklore especially Rejang’s superstitions and games has local wisdom that can be categorized as universal values since the writer believe that the folklore, in many places, also offers the same things and purposes, teach the exalted good values. Therefore, it can be said that folklore shares universal values teaching and bare the local wisdom of the area where is it performed and found. Folklore formed itself in a simple way to be transmitted from generation to generation because it can be practiced and transmitted in a flexible and interesting ways. Moreover, it can be found and practiced in the daily life and activities. However, the condition and the demand of the time create a hard path for folklore to withstand. Folklores are about to fade away in the society. Now, this crucial problem is in our hands. The act of re-teach and re-introduce the folklore to the young generation is strongly needed. Prof. Djuhertati in her essay about folklore stated that folklore could be used as evidence to explain the past experience of a certain nation and folklore is also a reflection of past events (2010). In other words, it can be said that preserving the folklore means preserving the history and culture. We cannot cross our hand and watch this phenomenon. Let us start make a difference and preserve the folklore because when we lost our folklore, it seems that we lost our identity and good thing in this life.

Acknowledgment

I want to thank the entire informants (*Pak Arbisah, iswadi, Kaharudin, Firman, Marakarma and Ibu Rayani, Leni Marlina, Maraya, Nurhanya, Ratna, and Eka Yunita*) in Desa Talang Baru, Topos, Lebong, Bengkulu. I thank them for all the information about the folklore for this paper.

References

- Bahari, Hamid. 2013. *Permainan-Permainan Perangsang Karakter Positif Anak*. Banguntapan, Jogjakarta.
- Bronner, Simon J. 2007. *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essay of Allan Dundes*. United States of America. Utah State University Press.
- Cooper, J. David. 2000. *Literacy Helping Children Construct Meaning*. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston.
- Dananjaya, J. 2002. *Folklore Indonesia: Ilmu Gosip, Dongen dan Lain-lain*. Cetakan ke IV. Pustaka Utama Grafiti. Jakarta.
- Endraswara, Suwardi. 2008. *Metodologi Penelitian Folklor*. Yogyakarta. Media Pressindo.
- Muhni, Djuhertati Imam. 2010. *Bunga Rampai Dari Amerika (American Bouquet)*. Yogyakarta. IMPULSE (Institute for Multiculturalism and Pluralism Studies).
- Sujarwo, Anton. <http://kebudayaanindonesia.net/id/culture/1266/suku-rejang-bengkulu>
Dinpar Rejang Lebong. <http://pariwisata.rejanglebongkab.go.id/wisatareligijs/>