

RITUAL DISCOURSE: LOCAL WISDOM IN THE TRADITIONAL LITERATURE OF USING ETHNIC GROUP IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study aims to understand and interpret the meaning of local wisdom in traditional literature, especially in the context of ritual discourse of *Barong Ider Bumi* (Kemiren), *Seblang* (Oleh Sari and Bakungan), and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan* (Aliyan and Alasmalang). Traditional literature is a product as well as cultural reflection from various ethnic groups in Indonesia, including Using, Banyuwangi, East Java. The research method used ethnographic approach, especially the emic perspective, and Geertz's cultural interpretation analysis. The results showed that ritual discourse includes the whole speech within a unity, which involves either ritual texts in the form of *ujub*, sacred texts in the form of mantras, or narrative texts in the form of discourses spoken by traditional leaders or local officials in ritual processions. Local wisdom in traditional literature shows a variety of positive values some of which serve in daily life as cosmic unity (between profane and sacred domains), harmony of natural ecosystem, and collective safety. These local wisdoms become worldview values for Using people. The sociocultural implications of local wisdom can be used by the local community as a social harmony media that support the local religious system and strengthen the social structure, so that it can be interpreted that ritual discourse becomes an integral part of traditional social institution.

Keywords: Local wisdom, ritual, social institution, traditional literature, *Using* ethnic group.

1. Introduction

Traditional literature is a cultural expression of local communities, both autonomous and inherent in other cultural products, including rituals. As an ethnic product, traditional literature represents the owners' ethnicity, identity, and local wisdom. Tradition literature is widespread in various ethnic groups in the Indonesian archipelago, including in using community in the eastern edge of Java, Indonesia. For Using people, traditional literature is a product as well as a cultural reflection over the phenomena of socio-cultural relations in everyday life.

Like other ethnic groups, empirical reality in the field shows that various rituals in Using community—including *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan*—are held completely in the form of material elements through offerings and verbal elements that involve mantra and behavior in the ritual acts. In a series of ritual processions, there is a stage that must be expressed through mantras by *pawang* (diviner) in addition to prayer by religious leaders. This shows that a series of rituals contain the expressions of traditional literature.

Nonetheless, traditional literature in rituals is related to local religion and the collective imagination of the relations between the microcosm and the macrocosm. This is closely related to belief in unseen and supernatural powers. Sacred texts become mediators in expressing belief in the ancestral heritage in the form of religious practices. In this context, ritual discourse reflects various local wisdoms applied as cultural institutions. Based on this, this study aims to understand and interpret the meaning of local wisdom in traditional literature, especially in the context of the ritual discourse of *Barong Ider Bumi* (Kemiren), *Seblang* (Oleh Sari and Bakungan), and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan* (Aliyan and Alasmalang).

2. Literature Review

The study of traditional literature in ritual discourse has been carried out by previous researchers. The sacred text has been studied by Soedjijono et al. (1987) with a conclusion that the substance of mantra reflects the life philosophy of the owning community. Saputra (2001; 2007) views the sacred text as a cultural mechanism in solving everyday problems so that it becomes a traditional social institution. In the study of *Seblang* ritual, Wessing (1999) interprets it as a sacred and mysterious symbol of life, while Anoe-grajekti (2003) emphasizes the identity of Using community. Saputra (2014) interprets *Seblang* as a binder of inner collectivity in achieving social harmony, while its existence is timeless because its function is still felt by the owning community (Saputra, Maslikatin & Hariyadi, 2017a; 2017b; 2018). In his study of *Keboan* ritual, Wessing (2016) emphasizes that the ritual of *Keboan* Aliyan is still sacred by prioritizing the purpose of maintaining the source of holy fertility, while in Alasmalang it has shifted to the implementation of government secular development policies.

Sacred texts are used not only in collective rituals but also individually. The Sakai people (Riau), for example, has songs of spirits, namely *De'o*, *Bayu*, and *Dikei*, which incidentally are sacred texts for individual healing (Porath, 2012). For Balinese, mystical healing can be done by *balian usada* ('healing witch') with *Yoga Sastra*, which is sacred text originating from holy script (Prastika, 2017). Petalangan people (Riau) sing a mystical song, *Menumbai*, when they will take honey in a honeycomb on *sialang* tree in the middle of the forest. The sacred texts are sung in order to be safe in taking honey (Yoonhee Kang, 2012). Sentani people (Papua) in the ritual of death recite the sacred text *Helaeheli* ('lament of death'), to commemorate the good dedication of someone who died (Yektiningtyas-Modouw, 2008). Studies of the sacred discourse, concerning the people of Using, Sakai, Bali, Petalangan, and Sentani, describe that life cannot be separated from the cultural mechanism. Sacred texts that blend with rituals and become the expressions of tradition literature form traditional social institutions that are utilized by local communities in achieving social harmony.

3. Research Method

Attempts to understand the meaning of local wisdom in the discourse of *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan* rituals were made by participant observation during the ritual processions, which were held in Kemiren, Olehsari, Bakungan, Aliyan, and Alasmalang. A series of ritual processions were observed in order to support deep understanding in order to interpret their meaning. Sacred texts that became verbal ritual elements were explored by interviewing the diviners. In this context, the research method used ethnographic approach, especially the emic perspective. Ethnographic work mechanism is followed by referring to (1) things people say, (2) the way people act, and (3) various artifacts that people use (Spradley, 1997, p. 10). The working mechanism is based on a perspective that emphasizes the views of the community under study, so that it applied the emic perspective.

The data of sacred texts and ritual contexts are classified as materials to be analyzed using the interpretive-cultural paradigm (Geertz, 1989; 1992). The selection of this paradigm is considered capable of being an academic mechanism in understanding the substantive meaning of local wisdom in the sacred ritual texts of Using community. Analysis of sacred texts and ritual contexts emphasizes interpretiveness in order to find the meaning of local wisdom that exists in the sacred discourse. The sacred texts analyzed include *Ater-ater* and *Ngundang* mantras that are available in *Seblang Olehsari* ritual. The meaning of the texts is interpreted in the context of local wisdom and local religion.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study showed that ritual discourse includes the whole speech which is a unity, involving ritual texts in the form of *ujub*, sacred texts in the form of mantras, and narrative texts in the form of discourses delivered by traditional leaders or local officials in ritual processions. In the niches of the life of Using ethnic group—heirs of Blambangan Kingdom who lived on the eastern edge of Java Island—traditional literature was reflected in various genres but was dominated by the rhythmic genre of sacred poetry. Traditional literature was closely related to oral literature (oral tradition), which reflected the cultural ideology of salvation in the integration between microcosm and macrocosm.

Ritual discourse (in *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Keboan-keboan*) as an expression of traditional literature becomes a verbal element of ritual actions which are full of local wisdom content, namely awareness of cosmic, natural ecosystems, natural cycles of life, relations with *alam alus* (soft nature/soft world) and also fellow *alam kasar* (coarse nature/rough world) (see, Saputra, Hariyadi, Maslikatin, 2018, pp. 5-6). This is reflected in sacred texts in the form of spells, behaviors in the form of ritual actions, and profane discourses in the form of narratives (speeches) of traditional leaders and local officials. The ritual discourse has a parallel pattern between one ritual procession and the others.

The ritual discourse reflects that caring and responsiveness to cosmic harmony are a reflection of collective imagination, which leads to common fertility (prosperity) and safety (peace). In the sacred text, cosmic harmony is rooted and culminated in the concept of *slamet* (safety), so that lexicon *slamet* expressed through a variety of variants—such as *slametan*, *keslametan*, *keslametane*, *nylameti*, *slamet kabeh*, *ayem tentrem*, *njaga*, *sing ana alangan*, *tolak balak*—contained in sacred texts in *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan* rituals is a philosophical essence that becomes a reference as well as attachment to the minds of Using community. The final estuary of the purpose and function of the ritual is the condition of mutual salvation, especially within the scope of one village.

Ater-ater and *Ngundang* mantras in the Seblang Olehsari ritual, for example, are local prayers that reflect the strong relation between *alam kasar* and *alam alus* for preparing and doing the salvation ritual. The mantras become prayers of salvation for the local community, especially the residents of Olehsari Village in order that they are protected from calamitous disasters and all at once being able to sustain social harmony. *Ater-ater* and *Ngundang* mantras can be detailed in the following quotations (interview with Seblang handler, Akwan, 15 August 2014).

1. *Ater-ater*

- (1) *Cikal bakal hang mbaureksa Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (2) *Para dhanyang hang mbaureksa Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (3) *Para leluhur hang mbaureksa Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (4) *Isun ater-ater dedhaharan*
- (5) *Iwak pitik kembang telon*
- (6) *Sekul arum banyu arum*
- (7) *Ubarampe sak cukupe*
- (8) *Isun njaluk kslamatan Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (9) *Ayem tentrem agung rejekine*
- (10) *Upacara adat Gandrung arep diangkataken*¹
- (11) *Isun njaluk cikal bakal para dhanyang para leluhur*
- (12) *Njaga kslamatan Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (13) *Muga-muga slamet sing ana alangan*
- (14) *Slamet kabeh warga Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (15) *Sak pira-pira ana keluputan*
- (16) *Sak pira-pira ana kekurangan*
- (17) *Isun njaluk pangapura*

1. *Ater-ater* (Giving up offerings)²

- (1) *Cikal bakal* (Forerunners)³ that protect Ulih-Ulihan Village⁴
- (2) *Dhanyang* (The spirits)⁵ that protect Ulih-Ulihan Village
- (3) *Leluhur* (Ancestors)⁶ that protect Ulih-Ulihan Village
- (4) I serve the food
- (5) *Telon* flower chicken meat
- (6) Perfume Frankincense
- (7) Complete banquet facilities
- (8) I request for the safety of Ulih-Ulihan Village
- (9) Calm peaceful prosperous
- (10) *Gandrungan* traditional ceremony will be held
- (11) I beg all forerunners, ancestors
- (12) To protect Ulih-Ulihan Village
- (13) Hopefully, it's safe and no obstruction
- (14) Safety for all residents of Ulih-ulihan Village
- (15) If we had mistaken
- (16) If we had shortages
- (17) I apologize

¹ In the context of Seblang ritual, the term *Gandrung* or *Gandrungan* needs an explanation. In a *alam kasar* (rough world) perspective (in the view of Using people), the traditional rituals in Olehsari are called *Seblang* (*Seblangan*), while in *alam alus* (soft world) perspective (according to the spirit view contained in mantra texts), the rituals are called *Gandrungan* and the dancer is called *Gandrung*. Meanwhile, in a rough world perspective, *Gandrung* is a nickname for dancers or performers who dance modern social intercourse dances called *Gandrung* dance.

² *Slamatan ater-ater* (*Ater-ater* gathering) is conducted at Buyut Ketut tomb, led by *Seblang* handler, followed by virgins—one or more people—as a symbol of the offering to Buyut Ketut.

³ *Cikal bakal* is forerunner that can be interpreted as a spirit that becomes the founder or opening of land from forest land into a dwelling. In Using-Indonesia dictionary (Ali, 2003, p. 68), *cikal bakal* is interpreted as a precursor, founder, pioneer, leader of a region or descendant.

⁴ Ulih-ulihan is a cultural name (a name in the past) for Olehsari Village.

⁵ *Dhanyang* can be interpreted as a spirit that protects and maintains the fertility of the village. One village can have several *dhanyangs*.

⁶ *Leluhur* come from the term *dhanyang leluhur*, but later became popular with *leluhur* (ancestors). When *cikal bakal* is gone, then the descendants of the *cikal bakal* and *dhanyang* can unite to become *dhanyang leluhur* or only *leluhur*.

2. Ngundang

- (1) *Cikal bakal hang mbaureksa Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (2) *Para dhanyang hang mbaureksa Desa Ulih-ulihan*
- (3) *Para dhanyang hang teka wetan*
- (4) *Para dhanyang hang teka elor*
- (5) *Para dhanyang hang teka kulon*
- (6) *Para dhanyang hang teka kidul*
- (7) *Mangga iki wis wayahe upacara adat Gandrung*
- (8) *Mangga rika kabeh dugi mriki*
- (9) *Isun marek nyawisi hidangan*
- (10) *Sekul arum kembang telon*
- (11) *Kanggo kinabulan slametan desa*
- (12) *Kang diangkataken setahun sepisan*
- (13) *Supaya Desa Ulih-ulihan aman ayem tentrem*

2. Ngundang (Bringing the Spirits)

- (1) Forerunners that protect Ulih-Ulihan Village
- (2) Spirits that protect Ulih-Ulihan Village
- (3) All Spirits from the East
- (4) All spirits from the North
- (5) All spirits from the West
- (6) All spirits from the South
- (7) Please come, it's the time for *Gandrungan* traditional ceremony
- (8) Please come all of you here
- (9) I have prepared a banquet
- (10) Frankincense and *telon* flowers
- (11) For the sake of fulfilling village salvation
- (12) Which is celebrated once a year
- (13) So that *Ulih-ulihan* village is safe and peaceful

Ater-ater mantra is used to start the series of *Seblang Olehsari* rituals and at the same time as an opening greeting to the spirit of *Buyut Ketut* who is one of the village guards. This mantra is a medium of communication between the rough world ("human") and soft world ("spirits") which include the *cikal bakal*, *dhanyang*, and *leluhur* in order that the soft world is willing to participate in the *Seblang Olehsari* celebration. In addition, the participation of the soft world is expected to be able to maintain the safety of all residents of *Ulih-ulihan* (*Olehsari*) from the interference of evil spirits.

Meanwhile, *Ngundang* mantra is a medium to bring spirits from the four corners, namely from the East, North, West and South (the circular direction opposite the clockwise direction) which is the protector of the *Ulih-ulihan* residents. They were invited to come to the *Gandrungan* event which was held once a year with meals in the form of incense and *telon* flowers. With the presence of the spirits who are considered good, it is believed that the area and local residents will be safe, calm, and peaceful. In this context, Using indigenous people, especially residents of *Olehsari*, believe that the implementation of the *Seblang* ritual becomes a means of local religious expression which is interpreted as a means of achieving safety and tranquility.

These sacred texts are verbal elements of rituals that have been fused and become an inseparable part of the local Using religion. The texts become a means of communication with indigenous people with spirits in order to celebrate rituals to protect the public from the interference of evil spirits. Sacred texts and ritual actions (verbal and nonverbal elements) are believed by the Using community as a heritage of ancestors that can maintain social relations in realizing social harmony. This can be interpreted that ritual is not only a means to maintain an atmosphere of religiosity but also as a traditional social institution that is capable of realizing collective imagination, namely social harmony. In this context, rituals have penetrated religious boundaries, because they combine traditions between Hindu, Islamic, and local Using wisdom.

In the context of Using tradition, the belief in rituals and sacred texts cannot be separated from the cultural roots of the *Blambangan Kingdom* heritage, which in fact came from the Hindu tradition. Nevertheless, the Islamization movement launched by *Mataram* did not really eliminate the residual elements of Hindu-Bali from the minds of *Blambangan*

descendants. The residue can be observed from tradition, art, and rituals carried out by Using community until now. Those who celebrate rituals are generally followers of traditionalist Islam.

In the rituals of *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan*, the later elements of Islam are considered to have intersection or slice territory, not contradictory, with Hindu elements rituals that existed before, so that the two were combined. *Slametan* that began and ended the entire series of rituals of *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Keboan-keboan*, was led by Muslim leaders or religious leaders with *donga* (Islamic prayers). Throughout the pre-ritual to post-ritual period, the handler colored the ritual procession with fully-stinging smoke of *sekul arum* or incense.

The perseverance of sacred texts (*japa mantra*, *mantra*, *donga*) of Hindu heritage combined with Islamic tradition (prayer) is memorized not only in collective rituals but also individually. In rituals of grace, the mantras (*Santet*, semi-constructive/semi-destructive) or those that harm (*Sihir*, destructive), for example, combine two elements of religion, namely the local traditions of Hindu spirit and Islamic tradition. Although it contains positive and negative elements, these individual rituals are believed by some Using communities as an alternative to traditional social institutions. This is conducted as an alternative solution to everyday problems when normative solutions cannot be implemented.

This phenomenon shows Hindu and Islamic syncretism manifested in rituals in Using community, along with the complementary sacred texts. Syncretic phenomena give the spirit of religious emotion, so that it forms the religious system of Using community. The system is based on beliefs that are manifested in rituals by social unity with its means of completeness. Most Using communities carry out Islamic worship and also preserve their ancestral heritage in the form of rituals along with sacred texts.

Sacred texts and rituals in the context of Using syncretic tradition can be interpreted as a reflection of the worldview (*weltanschauung*) of Using people; that is, an understanding of reality as a whole cosmic, which concerns the nature, values, meanings, and purpose of life, and human existence (see, Saputra, et al., 2018). The same thing applies to other forms of existence, especially the sacred. The existence of safety (peace) is not controlled by oneself (coarse nature) but is determined in relation to other dimensions (soft nature). The existence of fertility (prosperity) is determined by the *cikal bakal* (forerunner), *dhanyang* (keeper), and ancestors. The essential purpose of life in Using tradition is the achievement of harmony and cosmic balance, which forms social harmony. Such understanding and appreciation illustrate that the treasures of experience and knowledge applied by Using people in the natural and supernatural realm, leading them to beliefs that can determine the existence of life. The worldview of Using people reflects the cosmological relationship of the Using community with the universe and mystical power, both at horizontal and vertical levels. The rituals of *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan* and sacred texts become articulate and persuasive media in expressing fragmentary views of their world.

The rituals of *Barong Ider Bumi*, *Seblang*, and *Keboan/Kebo-keboan* still exist because they are functional, supported by cultural conditions (religious and knowledge systems) and social conditions (geographical and agrarian environment). Using people's belief in local wisdom in the form of a union between mystical power and social power still continues until this global age. This has implications on their view that ancestral inheritance in the form of ritual institutions must be carried out in accordance with the conventional space and time. Violations in the form of not implementing or implementing but not in accordance with customs have an impact on the emergence of disharmony, which can go along with the coming of illness or the cessation of the flow of fortune, which leads to the phenomenon of cultural disintegration (Saputra, 2013, pp. 21-22).

Some of *Seblang* Olehsari cases in the 1960s (not celebrated), the 1980s (celebrated solely as entertainment shows), and 2007 (hegemony by the power of political parties) indicated the phenomenon of disintegration. A similar thing also happened in *Seblang* Bakungan in 2011 (replacing the fighting session of cocks within the performance of *pitik-pitik'an* (imitative chickens) played by humans, which resulted in disaster for some *Seblang* actors. The case of *Keboan/Kebo-keboan* ritual in 1965-1966 which was not celebrated because of the uncertain socio-political situation in Indonesia had implications for the emergence of strangeness that happened to the citizens, including those who were possessed like raging buffaloes while shouting. Cases that were not much different, as reported by Sulistyani (2010), happened to Kemiren residents because they did not celebrate *Barong Ider Bumi*. The implication of this was that social anxiety arose due to illness and some unusual events. In fact, in other cases, the family members of *Barong* owner suddenly got sick and cramped, then grinned like *Barong* and finally died.

Such a phenomenon becomes a cultural sign that using people's beliefs in rituals of ancestral heritage is an integral part of the religious system as well as everyday cultural practices. Ignorance to absence of celebrating ritual results in the emergence of cultural "chaos". This was evident from the emergence of psychological burdens for individuals/parties involved, as well as resulting in disharmony of social relations, which affect the social structure. This has implications for social relations, both among individuals, between social groups, and between social institutions, forming disharmony relations. This means that the ritual function cannot be separated from the social context and cultural context, and simultaneously contributes to the social structure. Ritual disharmony has implications for disharmony of social structures. Thus, ritual local wisdom has dimensions of strengthening social structures.

Presentation of the results of the study shows that traditional literature contains genealogical discourse concerning *cikal bakal*, *dhanyang*, and local ancestors. Ritual discourse in traditional literature contains beliefs, thus reflecting the religious aspects of the active heirs and indigenous people, while realizing social harmony and strengthening social structures. This also reflects the worldview of the local community. Accordingly, the rituals and various discourses accompanying them have become traditional social institutions. It can be interpreted that the dominant values of local wisdom from traditional literature are the formation of traditional social institutions that lead to social safety and harmony, both in vertical relations (microcosm) and horizontal relations (macrocosm).

5. Conclusions

Local wisdom in traditional literature, especially in ritual discourse in Using ethnic group, shows various positive values that function in daily life. The values of local wisdom include cosmic unity (between the profane and the sacred domains), harmony of natural ecosystems, and collective safety. The values of local wisdom become Using people's worldview. The sociocultural implications of local wisdom can be used by local communities as a medium of social harmony that supports the local religious system and strengthens social structures. Thus, it can be interpreted that ritual discourse becomes an integral part of the traditional social institutions of Using people, Banyuwangi.

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