CULTURAL VALUES IN SEREN TAUN CEREMONY IN THE COMMUNITY OF PASIR EURIH VILLAGE, TAMANSARI, BOGOR, WEST JAVA

Yeni Budi Rachman
Department of Library and Information Science
Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia
yeni.budi@ui.ac.id

Abstract

This research discusses the cultural values found in Seren Taun ceremony held by the community in Pasir Eurih Village, Tamansari District, Bogor City, West Java. The Sundanese community who resides in Pasir Eurih Village has a tradition to hold Seren Taun ceremony which is very distinctive and still held until now. This Seren Taun or Sidekah Bumi ceremony has been done since the period of Padjadjaran kingdom. In the past, Seren Taun ceremony was held as a gratitude for the bountiful harvest. However, with the changing livelihood of the community that is not limited to farming anymore, Seren Taun ceremony is now held in order to conserve the tradition of the people. Therefore, this research tries to identify whether the Seren Taun ceremony held in Sindang Barang Indigenous Village is adaptive towards new values that are developed in this modern time. This research is a qualitative research of which approaches accommodate the viewpoint that tradition experiences change. The data is gathered by interview and literature study. The result of this research shows that Seren Taun ceremony in Pasir Eurih Village is adaptive towards the development of modern people today.

Keywords: Seren Taun, Adaptive Value, Sundanese Culture, Cultural Values

Introduction

Indonesia is an agrarian country with tropical climate and annual rain and sun. With tropical climate, fertile soil, and area surrounded by mountains, Indonesia becomes a country with abundant of natural resources. This is also followed by distinctive agrarian tradition and culture. Most of Indonesians' occupation are farmers. One part of Indonesia that has a unique agrarian tradition and cultural values is the City of Bogor. Bogor is one of the city located in Java island and a part of the West Java province. This Seren Taun or Sidekah Bumi ceremony has been done since the period of Padjadjaran kingdom. When Padjadjaran kingdom fell, this annual event vanished and it was re-initiated by the village chief of Sindang Barang after 32 years. Unfortunately, after he passed away in 1971, this event was nullified for some time. Only after 35 years later this
ceremony is initiated again in Sindang Barang Indigenous Village, Pasir Eurih. Sindang Barang Indigenous Village is a cultural village developed in order to preserve Sundanese culture. In the past, Seren Taun ceremony is held as a gratitude for the bountiful harvest. However, with the changing livelihood of the community that isnot limited to farming anymore, Seren Taun ceremony is now held in order to conserve the tradition of the people. Aside from running the function of cultural conservation, Seren Taun ceremony also runs a tourism function, which is attracting the interest of tourists and visitors outside the area to see the ceremony directly.

In Indonesia, Seren Taun ceremony is also known in several areas in West Java. Some of them are Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village, Kuningan; Ciptagelar Village, Sukabumi; Kanekes Village, Lebak District, Banten; and also in Naga Village, Tasikmalaya. The distinction that differs Seren Taun ceremony in Sindang Barang is the Islamic trace that covers the process of the ritual. Even though the residents of Pasir Eurih Village mostly do not live on farming anymore, this ritual is being kept to conserve the Sundanese tradition. Based on the explanation, the question in this study is:

1. Is the Seren Taun ceremony held in Sindang Barang Indigenous Village adaptive towards the values progressing in this modern day?
2. What changes occur in the Seren Taun ritual held these days?

The objective of this study is to identify whether Seren Taun ritual is adaptive towards the values progressing in this modern day. Furthermore, this study also intends to understand the changes occurred in Seren Taun ritual held in Sindang Barang Indigenous Village, Pasir Eurih.

Literature Review

Research about Seren Taun ceremony in Sindang Barang Indigenous Village has been conducted by Untung Prasetyo in 2011 under the title “Komodifikasi Upacara Tradisional Seren Taun dalam Pembentukan Identitas Komunitas.” From the result of the research, we know that the commodification process of traditional ceremony Seren Taun Indigenous Village Sindang Barang tends to be low, so the motive and behavior in conducting Seren Taun traditional ceremony tends to be high. This is caused by how the people of Sindang Barang Indigenous Village see Seren Taun traditional ceremony as a facility to express their gratitude for God and the goddess of fertility, building solidarity and familiarity between the community, preserving the organization of community, and preserving Sundanese traditional art. It cannot be denied that the local authorities also have their own agenda by administering the Seren Taun traditional ceremony, by using Seren Taun ceremony as a cultural tourism object so that Pasir Eurih Village will be known and conducive to increase the development
(Prasetyo, 2011). The next research was conducted by Dina Amalia Susanto (2008) under the title “Hibrida lokal-global pada politik komodifikasi budaya serentaun rekonstruktif, upacara tahunan masyarakat sunda, di Sindangbarang kabupaten Bogor,” this research shows that Seren Taun ceremony was revitalized to be modified in the development of cultural tourism. Moreover, the economic politic movement that commodify traditional culture in local areas under the global capitalism space will give profit to transnational party who has corporation fund. Although, neither of the two researches has studied whether the Seren Taun ritual is adaptive towards the modern values progressing these days and the changes that could possibly happen in the ritual.

Vallibhotama (1986, p. 201) stated that ritual is a symbolic representation from a group of people. Ritual is a part of human’s culture that represents hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows in life. Ritual also represents the relation between humans that is vertical (towards God) and horizontal (towards fellow humans). In Indonesia, there are various rituals or ceremonies that are related to the circle of life (birth and death), to the rituals that show gratitude and hope for a better life towards God. If agrarian people know Sedekah Bumi (Earth Alms) ceremony, fishermen in coastal areas know Selamat Laut ceremony. Even though the procession of the ritual might be different, the message relayed is the same, which is to show gratitude for the present life and hopes for a better future. In the ritual, people also try to appreciate the fortune in the form of plentiful comestibles graced by God. Shills (1971) explained that tradition is a belief under certain social structure, which is conceded in certain time. Moreover, a tradition can also have a structure continuity and discontinuity, which means a lost tradition or belief is possible to be renewed.

Change is eternal. As one form of a dynamic culture, ritual in the life of a community is always developing and changing as time goes by. As an adaptive form of culture, ritual is also adjusting to its environment. The development and change are not only identified by the physical form, but also by the individuals involved. Unfortunately, these developments and changes often are not always accompanied by the effort to relay the cultural values to the next generations. A lot of rituals today is only conducted for its tourism function without considering that anyone can learn or develop a knowledge from the ritual which ends a ritual just as a display or a show, even though essentially, the conservation and the development of a culture should be conducted by repackaging the cultural values in a new form, appropriate with the continuous demand of the world (Rahyono, 2009, p. 32). Hatch (1997) mentioned that value is a social principle, objective, and standard used in a culture to acquire an intrinsic value. These values include obedience value, loyalty value, appreciation-for-the-ancestors value, historical value, et cetera. For that, the development and change in a ritual is still possible without overlooking the cultural values within.
Research Methodology

This research uses case study method and qualitative approach. Stake (1995) in Creswell (2009, p. 20) explained that case study method can be understood as a research method used to investigate an event, a program, an activity, a process, or a group of individuals, by undergoing various data gathering procedure based on the time determined. Therefore, a case study method is trying to understand an event, an activity, or a process and environment interaction from individuals or certain communities based on the data gathering procedure and the time limit determined. By using qualitative approach, researcher tries to understand from the participants or subjects’ point of view. In this research, the key informant is the performer of the traditional ceremony Seren Taun in Pasir Eurih Village, Tamansari, Bogor, West Java.

This research was conducted in Pasir Eurih Village and Sindang Barang Indigenous Village, Tamansari, Bogor, West Java. This research was conducted from August to December 2014. The data gathering was done by observation, interview, and document study. Observation and interview were done to acquire a complete information regarding socio-cultural life of the Sundanese community in Pasir Eurih Village and Seren Taun ceremony. The interview technique used is structured interview, where researcher has a guide in conducting an interview with the informant. The researcher prepares a draft of questions then turns it into a guide in conducting an interview.

In this research, the informant is the initiator and a participator of the Seren Taun traditional ceremony in Sindang Barang Indigenous Village, the chief of Pasir Eurih Village, and a representation of the people of Pasir Eurih Village, Tamansari, Bogor, West Java. The following table shows the description of the informants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mr. Ukat</td>
<td>Coordinator of Sindang Barang Indigenous Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mr. Adang</td>
<td>Village chief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document study is also done to acquire factual data about the geographic condition, socio-economic condition, and other supporting data which cannot be acquired from interview or observation. The analysis of the research data is presented in a narrative completed with images as a support. After the analysis is finished, researcher will draw a conclusion and provide input based on the findings in the field.

Results and Discussion

Before discussing further about whether Seren Taun ritual is adaptive towards the modern culture and the changes occurred in the ritual, perhaps it would be best
to firstly discuss about the *Seren Taun* ceremony itself in Sindang Barang community. The *Seren Taun* or *Sidekah Bumi* ceremony performed by the people in Pasir Eurih Village, Tamansari, Bogor originally has been conducted since the period of Padjadjaran kingdom. Although, when Padjadjaran Kingdom fell, this annual event vanished for a while until it was later reinstated. Prasetyo (2011, p. 183) explained that 17 years after the downfall of Padjadjaran kingdom (estimated year 1596), one of the notable personality, Ki Murwa Alih, performed the *Seren Taun* traditional ceremony. The background of the performed *Seren Taun* ceremony at that time was the poverty of the Sindang Barang people and the surrounding area, this ritual is hoped to be able to solve the problem.

This ceremony then keeps on occurring until 1971 this procession is nullified once again. Only after 32 years, specifically in 2006, this ritual is conducted again in Sindang Barang Indigenous Village, Pasir Eurih Village. The initiator of this ceremony is Maki Sukmawijaya. Unlike *Seren Taun* ceremony in other Sundanese lands, the ceremony conducted in Pasir Eurih Village has Islamic traces in its ritual. This can be seen from the procession of the ceremony which is conducted in the month of Muharram, a month in Islamic calendar. This is stated by Mr. Ukat as the following:

“*Yes, ingenious village. Serentaun is conducted every year since 2006, and leaning more towards Islamic values because it is conducted every Muharram. In Banten, they’re 70% leaning more towards Sunda Wiwitan, where they still hold the wiwitan tradition even though they’re Muslims. The prayers (Salat) they done is in the heart only, and the teachings is following Prophet Adam where the command to do Salat is not yet given. It’s still confusing to find the difference because in Sindangbarang is not wiwitan anymore, but already strictly Islam, because Serentaun is to welcome Islamic New Year in the month Muharram, and paddy is only a ceremonial ritual to preserve past tradition, but in Banten Kidul the paddy that’s already kept for a year should not be opened because they say it has to be given a rest, nyipo haji, and the wiwitan people adverse to sell goods from rice, such as: lontong, uduk (Indonesian traditional foods) because it is part of their god. In the past, sedekah bumi only brought what can be brought, don’t force it, and eat it together, it is only to preserve the culture and gratitude.*” (Ukat, August 2014)

Based on the explanation above, we can understand that the fall of the Padjadjaran kingdom which is accompanied by the arrival of Islam into Sundaland has impacts on local tradition and custom, including in *Seren Taun* ceremony in Pasir Eurih Village, where the ceremony has Islamic traces in it. This also differentiates *Seren Taun* ceremony in Pasir Eurih Village from other similar ceremonies around the area. Pasir Eurih Village itself is a village which is located at the feet of Salak Mountain with overflowing water sources. The area borders Parakan Village to the north, Sirmagalih Village to the east, Tamansari Village to
the south, and Sukaresmi Village to the west. The majority of the people are Muslims and work as farmers, private employees, government employees, or entrepreneurs in making home industry shoes.

While talking about Seren Taun ceremony, we would have to discuss about the procession of the ritual. Concisely, there are several steps in conducting Seren Taun ritual. Those steps include:

1. Ngadieuken Night
2. Ngembang Ceremony
3. Munday Ceremony
4. Ngala Cikulu and Ngangkat
5. Sedekah Kue
6. Ngarak si Pelen and Nugel Munding
7. Tatalu and Kendang Pecak
8. Helaran Dondang

The following is the explanation of the eight steps of Seren Taun ceremony. The steps of this ceremony occur for seven days. The first step to do is Ngadieuken Night. During that night, the kokolot (elders) will gather to determine when the Seren Taun ceremony occurs. Usually, this ceremony will be conducted in the month of Muharram. The second step is Ngembang ceremony conducted in the morning. This activity is a visit to the grave of ancestors. Ngembang shows a tribute to the ancestors. The next is Munday ceremony, which is fishing in a river, which is participated by the kokolot and the residents. Before the Munday ceremony started, there is an event called sebret kasep or circumcising. Although, this event is not an absolute necessity, if the circumcising participants do not fill the quota, then the event would not be administered (under 10 people).

After the Munday ceremony is completed, Ngala Cikulu and Ngangkat ceremony is conducted the next day. Ngala Cikulu is a ceremony of drawing water in seven water springs (starting from the one located in the lowest area). The pitcher used to draw water then taken to the Imah Gede with angklung gubrak playing in the background. The seven water springs include those from Cipamali, Cimaeja, Cimalipah. At night, the watcher pitcher is brought to Ngangkat ceremony with Islamic song in the background and a spiritual speech. Ngangkat itself means to draw clear water. The next day, Sedekah Kue and Ngarak si Pelen (Nugel Munding) ceremony is conducted. The buffalo that is going to be slaughtered will first be paraded, then at noon, the meat will be distributed to the community. The final event is Tatalu and Helaran Dondang. Tatalu is conducted at night after the Nugel Munding event. Every kind of art, whether it’s traditional or modern, will be shown in a stage arranged by the community. Debus (traditional performance art), wayang (traditional shadow puppet), and kendang pecak (traditional martial arts) will be performed. In the morning, Helaran Dondang starts. In Helaran Dondang, the people will bring numerous products which then will be blessed on and scuffled over by the people. The togetherness in
gathering produces and dondang parade can be clearly seen at the peak of the event.

**Seren Taun Ritual as a Form of Adaptive Culture**

Susamto (2008) mentioned that the Seren Taun ritual has experience some developments. While originally this ritual is an expression of gratitude of the people for the abundant amount of fortune in the form of good harvest, now Seren Taun is a part of industrial product in the tourism sector. The changes cannot be disconnected from the social context of the development of the original heir of Seren Taun tradition in Sindang Barang. Based on the observation and the interview conducted, there are several forms of development in Seren Taun ritual that can be identified. This development is not only seen from the motive in conducting Seren Taun ceremony but also from the development of the procession of Seren Taun ceremony. The following is an explanation about the development of Seren Taun ceremony procession.

When Islam starts to enter the area, this ritual has several developments. One of the changes identified is the decision to perform the ritual on Muharram. Based on the interview with Mr. Ukat, we know that Seren Taun ceremony performed by Sindang Barang people used to be Seren Taun Majikeun Pare, which was a ritual performed after the end of the paddy harvesting period. At that time, the ceremony was meant to express gratitude towards the Goddess Sri. After Islam enters the area, this ritual is not performed as a gratitude towards the Goddess Sri anymore, but as a gratitude to Allah for the plentiful harvest that year. The use of Islamic prayers and the delivery of tausiyah (Islamic spiritual speech) in Ngangkat ceremony also emphasize the influence of Islam in those ritual processions. Moreover, the execution time of the ritual is now more flexible because it is not performed for the who 7 days anymore, it can be squeezed into 5 days, depends on the readiness of the community.

Judging from the motive of the execution of the ceremony, we can draw a temporary conclusion that the motive of performing the ceremony experience changes. In the past, the ceremony is conducted as a means to worship the Goddess Sri, now the motive is leaning more towards the effort to guide tradition and as a form of tourism commodity, aside from a gratitude to Allah. This can be seen from the professional management of Seren Taun ceremony procession under a management of Sindang Barang Indigenous Village. People from outside of the village who want to participate in the Seren Taun event can use a tourism package provided by the management of Sindang Barang Indigenous Village, as shown in image 4.1 below (http://kp-sindangbarang.com). This Seren Taun event is free of charge, the charge of the package is used for lodgings, meals, and dondang. Moreover, the procession of Seren Taun ceremony is now reinitiated and available for teenage participants to join in conserving Sundanese culture by learning the dances and martial arts taught at Sindang Barang Indigenous Village.
To promote Seren Taun ceremony, the management of Sindang Barang Indigenous Village also uses media socials such as Facebook, as shown below:

Judging from the execution of Seren Taun ritual, originally, there are no extreme changes in the procession of the ceremony. The informant (Mr. Ukat) stated that the Seren Taun ceremony starting from Netepkeun ceremony to Helaran Dondang conducted today is identical to the past. As explained in the literature review chapter, as a form of adaptive culture, ritual is conducted by
adjusting to the surroundings. Now, the majority of Pasir Eurih Villagers are not working in agriculture, but in running household industries, specifically in shoe making. This influences the execution of the ritual, especially in Helaran Dondang event. If in the past this ritual was identical to a display of harvests of Helaran Dondang event, now it is also full of community’s crafts like sandals and shoes. Even groups from outside of Tamansari District can also participate in Helaran Dondang event.

In the main event nearing the Helaran Dondang, the Tatalu, people will perform various forms of Sundanese culture, now the performance will also collaborate with other cultures. For instance, there are teenagers who perform Balipong dance, which is a combination of the Bali dance and Jaipong dance. Although, the performances are still required to contain the elements of Sundanese culture.

Conclusion

Based on the research conducted, the conclusion that can be drawn is that Seren Taun ritual is a form of adaptive culture. As an adaptive culture, there are several changes identified in the procession of Seren Taun rituals of Pasir Eurih Village. The adaptivity of Seren Taun ritual can be seen from the influence of Islam to the ritual, the determination of the flexible execution time, the using of information technology, and the gathering of produces that is not limited to harvests in one of the event’s procession. This changes is related to the social context of the development of Sindang Barang Villagers who do not rely on agricultural sector as main occupation anymore. As the input from this research, we hope that the government give active contribution in overseeing the development of Seren Taun ritual as a unique tradition of Sundanese culture, so this ritual can keep on developing without being engulfed with modern values that may bring negative impacts on Sundanese culture.

References


