

Myths of the "Si Beru Dayang" Folklore and the Vision in the Environment Conservation in Karo Regency, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The "Si Beru Dayang" folklore is one of the cultural heritages in Karo regency, North Sumatera and is believed to remain available since it stays in Karonese hearts and is inherited according to its function as a local wisdom. Research on the values of vision from the aspects of environment preservation based on the "Si Beru Dayang" folklore was carried out as efforts to prevent the extinction of the Karonese cultural heritage which is thought to be potential in the moral development in North Sumatera, and specifically in the environment preservation for paddy fields. This study aims to describe the myths and the vision of environment preservation found in the "Si Beru Dayang" folklore by qualitative descriptive methods and by interviews. Data was obtained by recording what informants told and analyzed by the literary sociology and cultural approaches. The sociological approach was focused on a number of concepts of folklore, myth, and environmental preservation. The results showed that the vision of environment preservation, especially the vision of rice fields, might refer to scientific and rational explanation to strengthen the truth values about the myths from the folklore, and to create jargons or slogans that are capable for persuading, inviting, and encouraging local people to act to save their environment by preservation.

Keywords: Myth, Karonese Folklore, Si Beru Dayang, Environment Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Efforts in the environment conservation should pay a close attention to the interests of local communities because the integrity of conservation areas cannot be maintained without the availability of life sources for local communities whose survival depends on natural resources in their areas (Suparmini et al. 2012: 1). Environment conservation, based on Regulation No. 33 of 2009, refers to a series of efforts to maintain the continuity of the supporting capability and capacity of the environment. The supporting capability of environment means its ability to support the human's life, other living things, and the balance between the two.

In fact, approaches currently being used in the efforts of environment conservation are not sufficiently able to overcome the problems that exist. Bappenas in 2004 reported that there was an extraordinary shrinkage of the environment in Indonesia. The environment exploitation in Indonesia was massive; forest grasses, woodlands, and raw tailings were under shrinkage over the past ten years and only about 30% was left. Around 57.5% of pine forest and 60% of semi pine rainforest were recorded in good conditions.

Various environmental issues have finally emerged in Indonesia such as the decrease of food security, the shift from

producers to consumers of fuel, the floods, the landslides, the decrease of groundwater and river flows (including swamps, lakes, stagnant pit, etc.), the shrinking sources of oxygen, the reduction of agricultural areas and forests, the ecosystem imbalances, among others. The above environmental issues should be taken into consideration to question how the existing approaches were not enough to stem the development of society in Indonesia. If we assume that the development of society is the result of advances in science and technology, the focus of the discussion on such approaches in the context of environment conservation should be addressed to culture.

It is said that modern culture has changed people's pattern of life and their daily life. Likewise, modern culture has changed the mindset of how to use the environment as a consequence of society's progress. The flow of thought above finally converged on the efforts of environment conservation through a cultural approach. Sutarto argues cultural approaches always refer to cultural values and products possessed by certain ethnic groups or communities.

One of cultural entities being considered as the subject of discussion of this paper is the "Beru Dayang" myth belonging to one of Karonese folklores. How such myth forms culture and becomes a value system that governs and guides its community in an effort to support the vision of environmental preservation should be paid attention. Folk stories can be a vehicle for environmental expression, meaning it is a genre that is close to the universe. Likewise, Karonese folklore shows the wealth of environmental wisdom and became the community's guidelines for living in the past; the people knew the wisdom of their ancestral environment containing many cultural values reflecting the diversity of national cultures. The roots of the nation's culture are revealed in literary works containing great ideas, noble thoughts, valuable soul experiences, noble considerations about bad good qualities,

remorse for sins, feelings of mercy, high human views, among others.

The problems are: how can the folkloric myth become a value system that governs and guides the local people and how does the myth consist efforts to support the vision of environment conservation? The problems produced the form of a model supporting the vision of environment conservation in Nageri Village, Karo Regency. The vision that must be built in this context is that the environment preservation is an effort from the bottom layer (bottom-up), but not from top-down. All this means is that efforts to preserve the environment must begin from building and strengthening (or revitalizing) the elements of culture owned by the community, that are relevant to the effort.

RESEARCH APPROACHES

Concepts and Theories

Literally, the word *myth* comes from Greek 'muthos' or 'mythos' meaning 'something that is expressed, something that is said, for example a story.' Sukatman (2012: 1) argues myths are symbolic and sacred stories that tell a series of real or imaginary stories that contain the origins and changes of the universe and the world, gods, supernatural powers, heroes, humans, and certain societies; myths function to (a) continue and stabilize culture, (b) present life instructions, (c) validate cultural activities, (d) give meanings to human life, and (e) provide a model of knowledge to explain things that are unreasonable and complicated.

The classification of types of myths is very diverse; this shows that the viewpoint of mythical classification is very diverse. Based on the breadth of content and substance, according to Sukatman (2012: 6-7), myths can be grouped into (1) early myths of creation, (2) myths of cosmogony, (3) myths of origins, (4) myths of supernatural beings, (5) anthropogenic myths, (6) heroic myths (heroism), (7) myths of transformation, (8) languagenic myths, (9) ekhsatonic myths, and (10) ritual

myths or worship. The classification of diverse myths is usually found in diverse folktales which are themselves part of folklores.

Seen from its types, Brunvand (in Danandjaja, 1994: 21) divides folklore into three major groups, namely verbal folklore, partly verbal folklore, and nonverbal folklore; oral folklore is the one whose form is purely oral. The specific forms of folklore included in this large group include (a) folk language such as accent, nickname, traditional rank, and nobility titles, (b) traditional expressions, such as languages, proverbs, and prerogatives, (c) traditional questions, such as puzzles, (d) folk poetry, such as rhymes, *gurindam*, and fairy tale, (e) folklore, such as mite, legends, and fables, and (f) folk songs.

In general, folklore can be considered a purely fictional story, but it is also inspired by historical events and the rest is influenced by myths and legends depending on the events behind it (Sari et al., 2017). Sumardjo et al. (1986: 36) state folk folktale can be interpreted as a cultural expression of a society through speech that is directly related to various aspects and composition of values in a society. In case of the deepening and understanding of folkloric studies, Sutrisno (1981: 43) argues that folk tale is generated verbally and in written form. Here, the research carried out includes the embodiment and the inheritance of the text of a literary work, the interpretation, and comprehension. Myth is one of the socio-cultural phenomena found in folk tale.

In literary sociology, it is known the strategies related to understanding social action by considering people's lives as a complex network, interconnected, dependent and meaningful construction of social reality that is owned by every member of the group, the community or the

society. Levin (in Elizabeth, 1973: 66) says that literature with its original contents is an art which boldly expresses the depth of the soul and the overall social reality and can be an expression of the individual and also the collective expression of society. Therefore, to get a vision of environment preservation in the myth, the sociological approach of literature is primarily used.

Research Methods

The approach in this study is a qualitative and descriptive methods. Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 1998: 3) state that qualitative procedures produce research that reveals qualitative data with approaches are directed at the background and at individuals holistically (intact) or at views as a whole. According to Kirl and Miller (1986: 9) qualitative is a particular tradition in social science that is fundamentally dependent on observations in humans in their own regions and related to the fields of social and human sciences with activities are based on scientific disciplines to collect data, classify, analyze and interpret facts and on the relationship among facts of nature, society, behavior, and human spirit to find new principles of knowledge and methods. Data is captured through observation, recording and noting, and interviews with Karo informants.

Data analysis was carried during the data collection process. According to Miles and Huberman (2014: 12) data analysis was done in three stages of interactive models, namely data reduction, data presentation, and verification. The three stages took place simultaneously. In collecting data, researchers collected primary and secondary data. Analysis of folkloric texts was done by logical and realistic interpretation based on problems. Data was analyzed using the approach of literary sociology focusing on a number of concepts of folklore, myth, and environment conservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This paper is based on several studies that the authors have done before and the research results would be displayed in short in Fig. 1.

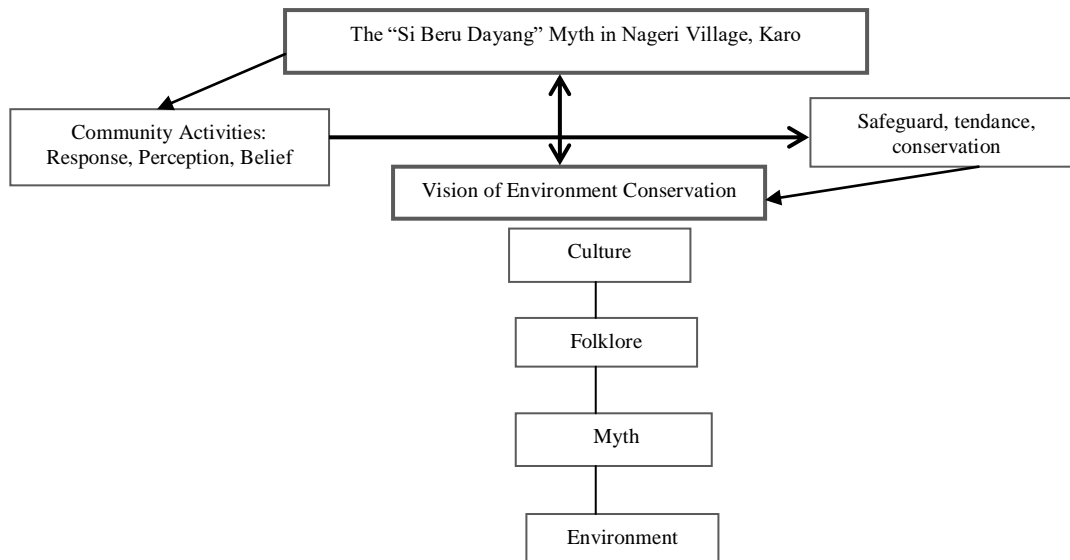


Figure 1. Cultural Approach Model (Myth of Folktale) used as Vision of Environment Conservation

DISCUSSION

Cultural Richness in Nageri Village, Karo Regency

The preservation efforts in "Si Beru Dayang" myth is only focused on mapping. More serious, scientific, and documentation efforts have never been made. The background is quite cliched, that is, the lack of a budget to implement it. The mapping of folklore that has been carried out by the regional government is indeed very important to pave the way for further research. However, stopping the mapping effort is still very lacking in efforts to preserve cultural wisdom as a legacy of the past.

An interview with Tarpim Kaban (57) noted that the Nageri Village had extraordinary folklores, both in quantity and quality. Some of the facts mentioned by the informants included: artifacts, grave sites, folktale, folk language, folk performances, folk songs, myths, local figures, cultural rituals, and local history. Until now, the folklores were still maintained by the supporting community. Kaban also argued that inventory, description, classification, and making documents for such cultural wealth had not been carried out. In fact, researchers and common society are difficult to get adequate references about the folklores.

From observations, researchers got the initial information that there are dozens of folktales, oral traditions, and cultural rituals that are scattered in the regions. Folkloric myths that can be noted are *Asal-Usul Desa Nageri* (Origins of the Nageri Village), *Patung Pulu Balang* (the Statue of Pulu Balang), *Guru Diden* (Master Diden), *Beru Dayang dan Asal Mula Padi di Tanah Karo* (the Beru Dayang and the Origins of Rice in Karo Land), the *Si Ilang-Ilang*, the *Beru Renggang Kuning*, the *Beru Ginting Sopo Mbelin*, *Pawang Ternalem* (Simalem the Diviner), the *Jangak*, the *Ring Pinta-Pinta*, the *Palas Si Pitu Ruang*, the *Si Jinaka* (the Witty), the *Si Aji Bonar*, *Guru Kandibata* (Master Kandibata), Origin of Mount Sibayak, Origin of the Karo Tribe, the *Gundaling*, the *Turin-Turin Kucing Mbiring* (the Turin-Turin of Mbiring the Cat), *Raja Milo-Ilo* (the King Milo-Milo), the *Gua Kemang Sembahe* (Cave Kemang in Sembahe), and the *Lau Kawar* (the Kawar Pond).

Perception of Karo Society over the "Si Beru Dayang" Myth

The "Si Beru Dayang" myth tells about a child who was changed into a seed which was then cut into pieces; the pieces were planted and maintained properly so that they grew like paddy plants. Local people believed that if they altogether took

care of the Beru Dayang, rice would flourish and produce results for them. The Javanese "Dewi Sri" folktale has the same plot telling about the rice fertility. Dewi Sri is considered a goddess who contributed fertility for rice cultivation, as well as for coconuts, bananas, among others.

The "Dewi Sri" and "Si Beru Dayang" are only examples of folkloric myths which are also found in several regions in Indonesia. The core of the myth is almost all the same, namely about plants originating from the body of a human. Such myth is interesting because they are related to the worship of fertility which is mainly believed by agriculture society. This myth of fertility also reflects sacrificed figures as symbols or parables of plant seeds which must be cut into pieces first, then new plants will grow.

There are two groups with reference to the Karonese current perception on the "Si Beru Dayang" myth; the first group remains to believe the myth and the other disbelieves and was supported by old generation whose educational background was not good; the second group which consists of young educated generation tends not to believe the myth. The old generation considers that the folkloric myth must be preserved so that community respects paddy plants and does not waste rice or food. The young generation argues that the myth is a mere story that did not really happen in the past because it was impossible for humans to be changed into rice.

The second group was graduated from primary, elementary (or junior), or high schools, or from college. Some of those who were graduated from junior high schools were noted to believe in the power of the "Si Beru Dayang" who became a figure being able to fertilize rice plants. They received the myth orally from their old generation in an easy-way-to-remember; therefore, they could remember the myth well and tended to convey to others. Many local myths were almost spread in the same way. However, some who were graduated from high schools and college began to

distrust both the existence and the power of myth because their mindsets were fulfilled with advancement or modernism so they did not believe in things that did not make sense. The members of this last group were also more religious; therefore, they only believe in the power generated from God.

Cultural Richness of the "Si Beru Dayang" Myth Relevant to Efforts of Environment Preservation

Based on its socio-culture and geography, the Nageri Village has various environments for living space for its people, namely the mountains, forests, rice fields, and old village environments. These various environments have diverse characteristics and weaknesses / advantages. This is the potential for the people in Nageri Village to develop their area. One of the ideal potentials in promoting environmental preservation is the use of cultural elements in the region. As a value system, guidance, and guideline for them to live, these cultural elements regulate and pattern their behaviors and way of thinking.

Oral tradition has proven its role in ecological conservation and development. Therefore, efforts to strengthen the oral tradition are needed. From several informants, the authors got information about the tradition of *merdang* (sowing seeds) from the "Si Beru Dayang" myth. The myth is passed down from generation to generation, believed by the local community and applied in their socio-cultural practices. Three myths from "The Beru Dayang" folklore are shown in the followings.

- a. Rice is the incarnation of human. The local community believed that if they together maintained the Beru Dayang, rice would produce more.
- b. Rice fertility is a human sacrifice. The myth about fertility also reflects a sacrificed figure who could be a symbol or parable for plant seeds. The myth teaches people not to fight for fruits but to take care of good rice, pounding, and cooking it.
- c. Betel offering to *Beraspati Taneh* (Lord of the Land) is the symbol of gratitude.

When the Karonese work together to hold a *merdang* (sowing seeds) ceremony, such ceremony is only given to *Beraspati Taneh* (Lord of the Land) who is hoped to maintain the their paddy plants from the planting season upto harvesting time and to deliver abundant yields (Interview with Tarpim Kaban (57), Nageri Village Chief).

The three myths are still believed to be true by the people in Nageri Village and their beliefs is realized by holding the Merdang ceremony not only to bring a source of livelihood for them, but also a public awareness to maintain, to care for, and to preserve the environment, especially the rice fields. Efforts to strengthen oral traditions in order to preserve the environment is, at the same time, having impacts on the preservation of oral traditions themselves.

The Vision of Environment Preservation

The community groups who still believe in the folklore are the elderly who argued such folklore must be preserved so that today's generation respect rice plants, rice, and food. By doing so, the Karo community can live prosperously with staple foods of fruits and tubers.

The "Si Beru Dayang" folklore firstly appeared when the people's welfare in Karo land was suddenly dimmed. Never had they imagined before that the dark ages would come; as a result, the prolonged dry season did not come to an end. The soil was dry so that the trees withered before they could bear fruit. As a result, almost all of the population in the region suffered from hunger. However, the King who reigned at that time did not keep silent with such condition. He ordered his people to perform two rituals, such as *mindu udan* (asking for rain) and *erpangkir ngarkari* (being ready to get rid of bad luck). However, all the efforts did not bring good results, such as drought was still plaguing the entire area. The catastrophe became more and more so that the bodies of the residents increasingly weakened and emaciated. Based on the myth, the Karonese community, especially the old age generation, believed that the catastrophe happening in their area could be

due to the act of man himself who likes to do evil. Therefore, they always taught their children to always do good so that calamities do not come.

We argue that the cultural approach can be an alternative for driving efforts in environmental conservation. The vision that must be built in this context is environmental preservation which is carried out from the bottom-up rather than from the top-down. This means that efforts to preserve the environment must begin by building and strengthening (revitalizing) the elements of culture that are owned by the community. Oral tradition as part of culture is still strong enough to influence and stick to people's minds. It is a value system that regulates and guides, and that is guided by the mindset and behavior of the people who own the culture. Some efforts that can be made to revitalize the cultural elements are written in the following.

a. To provide scientific and rational explanation to strengthen the values of truth about the myths that exist.

The myth of betel offerings to *beraspati taneh* should, for example, be proved scientifically with a hope that such process will produce good results. Then, the works of reaping, planting, and maintaining paddy fields properly are the efforts to obtain good results from the environment, especially rice. Conversely, if a work is not done wholeheartedly, the result will damage the environment.

b. To create jargon or slogan that is able to persuasively influence, invite, and encourage the community to participate in the environmental preservation in Nageri Village.

We also try to provide an enrichment such as "Respect the environment by maintaining and caring for it", "Green past can make the beloved Nageri village green", and "Nageri Village, a village that has never disappeared by the age" about the village image with regard to environmental preservation.

Environment preservation becomes the responsibility of the community that owns the environment. As a living space,

people certainly organize and develop their living space to sustain their lives. This is an innate responsibility which is currently undergoing a change in perspective. Another vision is that environmental conservation is directly related to the community in which they live. In this case, it is the culture that plays an important role. Nageri Village will surely be developed by technology advances and this big change is certainly marked by a shift (or a change) in mindset and culture where the possibility of erosion of mutual cooperation, help, tolerance, tenacity, and religious sense can be eroded although they had ever been maintained in the past. Efforts to strengthen (local) culture are needed, especially efforts to preserve the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The vision of environmental preservation, especially to preserve the environment for paddy fields in Nageri Village, Karo Regency, refers to two aspects: first, to explain more scientifically and rationally with a purpose to strengthen the truth of values about the myths found in the "Si Beru Dayang" folklore, and two, to create jargon or slogan that is able to persuasively influence, invite, and encourage the community to act with reference to environmental preservation.

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