

The Meaning Behind Rites

Symbolical Aspect of the Ngaruat Tradition with Cerita Batara Kala

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Abstract: One of the folklore forms of *Tatar Sunda* which is related to religious ceremonies is *Ngaruat Tradition* (NT) using *Cerita Batara Kala* (CBK). In the past, this tradition had an important role for the Sundanese. Along with the advancement of the era, especially religion, the function and role of NT in the society was fading. It is possible that in the future this tradition will vanish. As a cultural product that used to have a significant role, NT possess hidden and beneficial essential values. Therefore, this study aims to preserve the nation's cultural product by revealing the values contained in the product. Using the qualitative method, this study merged two interrelated things, namely NT and CBK, since most of the existing studies only focused on CBK or NT. The results revealed that the traditions described in CBK and NT are symbols of Sundanese values and views of life as follows: (1) humans as individuals; (2) humans relations with nature; (3) humans relations with their social environment; (4) humans relations with God, and (5) humans and their desire to pursue inner satisfaction. These results are expected to give a contribution in enriching studies about the tradition comprehensively. Semiotic approach was used to acquire results in the form of cultural values that could be used to strengthen the identity and character of the nation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Folklore is a part of culture that can be in the form of people's speech, traditional expressions like proverbs, riddles, prose like mite, legend, and tales (including anecdotes and jokes), folk song and music, theatre, games, beliefs, architectures, fine arts and paintings, gestures, and so on. Folklore can be used as an object to analyse the collective behaviours (mind set) of the supporters because it has the functions as: 1) projection system, 2) cultural ratification, 3) pedagogy, and 4) forcer of the enactment of community norms and control. Folklore also functions to strengthen the nation's identity and develop the local tourism (Bascom, 1965).

One of the forms of folklore (verbal tradition) in *Tatar Sunda* which is related to religious ceremonies and explored in this paper is *ngaruat* tradition (NT). In the past, this tradition had an important role in Sundanese people's lives which was identified with the existence of some vocabularies or terms related to *ngaruat* ceremony and the vocabularies and terms

are still verbally transmitted among the society. Seniors in nowadays' villages still address the word *sandekala* if they prohibit their children to go outside during *Maghrib*; even though they (perhaps) do not particularly understand the meaning behind the prohibited action. In correlation with the *ngaruat* tradition, one of the types of people that needs to be *ruat*-ed is the ones that travel during sunset (dusk). Based on the sound and literal meaning, the word *sandekala* refers to *Batara Kala*, a central character in NT. There are other things which are related to NT and uttered in the life of the society in *Tatar Sunda* today. The word *sandekala*, which used to be expressed by the Sundanese, derives from the Sanskrit word *sandhyakala* which means 'twilight' or 'dusk'. The connection between *sandekala* and *ngaruat* tradition is that someone who must be *ruat* -ed is someone who travels when the sun sets (at dusk). The word *sandekala* refers to *Batara Kala*, the central character of NT.

The word *ruwat* is one of lemmas in KBBI that is derived from Kawi Language which means 'detached' or 'free'; *rumuwat* or *mangruwat* means

attenuating, releasing, freeing, or eliminating. A word that is closely related to the word *ruwat* which is *sukerta* (someone who must be ruat-ed). The word *sukerta* appears in some Old Javanese texts, including *Hariwangsa*, *Sumanasantaka*, *Korawasrama*, *Nawaruci*, and *Sudamala* stories. From the word *sukerta* which appear in the tales, the terms *bocah sukerta* and *wong sukerta* emerge. That is why, at the period of time when *bocah sukerta* circumcised or married, the occasion was celebrated with a *wayang* show which performed overnight and told the story of *Murwakala* (Soeбалidinata, 1984) or CBK.

As the era advanced, NT and CBK will someday be forgotten. This is the reason why this study aims to: 1) document the components the oral forms of NT, 2) inventory NT devices, 3) reveal the implicit meaning, and 4) seek for the alternative way of socializing CBK as an interesting literary work.

2 RESEARCH METHODS

This study used qualitative method which tries to comprehend and interpret the meaning of an event or human interaction in a particular situation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The data collection was through literature and field studies in various libraries and places where NT and CBK could still be found. Through in-depth and open interviews, the data were gathered from traditional figures, puppetry artists, and those who had experience or were familiar with NT and CBK. In addition, the data were also collected by recording an *ngaruat* ceremony with CBK. The data were reduced by abstracting and arranging them in units, and then categorization and coding were conducted. The data analysis was finished by checking the data validity and interpreting it according to the semiotic approach.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ngaruat tradition (NT) is actually an effort to refuse misfortunes for the sake of achieving salvation and prosperity in leading a life. At least, that is what Peursen and Hartoko (2000) state that ceremonies from primitive tribes do not only function to repel dangers, but also to console each other; also as a preparation so that they can withstand adversities, such as plagues, dry season, and many more. *Ruatan* ceremony are *hybrid*, a mix; meaning that basic myth about a classification of two elements, which

underlies all *wayang* play that has been mixed with foreign elements. In this case, *wayang* play as a rite of affirmation towards ancestors' myths is mixed with *ngaruwat* ceremony for its own purposes.

3.1 *Ngaruat* Tradition with *Cerita Batara Kala*

Ngaruat tradition (NT), whether in Sunda or Java, is not only meant for humans. It can also be used to *ngaruat* a place. The difference between *ngaruat* someone (*sukerta*) and *ngaruat* a place is the story performed for the ceremony: *Cerita Batara Kala* (CBK) or *Murwakala* is meant for *ngaruat* people, whereas *Babad Alas Amer* and *Bumi Loka* is meant for *ngaruat* a place. However, if *sukerta*'s characteristic and group are observed, *ngaruat* ceremony performed for a place is essentially meant for people; the example is what Rosana (1964) says to a *sukerta* on number 32, "People who, without ethics, clear rice paddy fields, lands, places, and forests; as well as establish buildings, houses, barns, and sheds; are called *Kalaamer*". In relation, in *ngaruat* a place, still uses CBK at the end of the ceremony.

CBK is a story in puppetry (*pewayangan*) which is specially performed in *ngaruat* ceremony; in NT in Java, this story is known with *Murwakala* as the title and performed using shadow puppets (*wayang kulit*) as the medium. *Ngaruat* tradition is Sundanese' life is generally conducted by performing CBK through a puppet show (*wayang golek*). However, in some places, there are also people who perform this story through art performance of *wayang pantun*, *pantun*, and *beluk* without reducing the sacred nature of the ritual. In Majalengka, as an instance, besides using a shadow puppet show, *ngaruat* ceremony is also performed through *pantun* and/or *gaok* (another term for *beluk*) show. According to several puppet masters and locals, these performances are done to simplify the requirements in order to ease those who are incapable of paying a *wayang* group.

The aforementioned simplification of *ngaruat* ceremony is not only in terms of the performance media, but also in terms of the requirement such as offerings and a series of rituals.

3.2 *Ngaruat* Tradition with *Cerita Batara Kala*

There are five components that (must) be present in NT, they are *Sukerta*, CBK as the medium, a

storyteller, requirement/offerings, and/or mantra/raja.

Ngaruat or misfortune repellent is necessary for people who are considered as *sukerta*, which is people who need to be *ruat*-ed as an obligatory based on the status of the child in the family, physical deficiencies, and people who make a mistake in doing some particular jobs. Based on written data, people who must be *ruat*-ed or *sukertas* is divided into three types consisting of four groups based on: 1) birth processes (20 types), 2) physical deficiencies (16 types), 3) relationships with siblings and other family members (29 types); and 4) actions (58 types). Some of the examples are; twins (sons and daughters), *dampit* (a son and a daughter, quadruplets), *anak Sapar* (a child who is born on *Sapar* month), and so on.

The story that needs to be performed is *CBK* through a shadow puppet show, which then develops into a *wayang golek*, *wayang pantun*, *carita pantun*, and *beluk* shows. The election of the medium for this ceremony is based on the (economic) capabilities of the organizer of *ngaruat* ceremony. As for the storyteller who tells *CBK* in three different shows is puppet masters (*dalang*), *juru pantun*, and the leader of a *wawacan* (a long story which is composed with *canto* (*pupuh*) rules) manuscripts reading group.

As one of the sacred ritual traditions, *ngaruat* has absolute rules which cannot be taken for granted; starting from the procedures/ethics during the ceremony, the responsibility of the audiences, to the requirements that need to be provided by the hosts of the ceremony. The requirements are offerings (*sesajen*) and accessory (*rarangken*) which have to be provided during the *ngaruat* ceremony and includes: 13 types of food/drinks, 14 types of groceries, 9 types of waters, 5 types of dressings and accessories, 14 types of plants/leaves, 6 types of tools/furniture, and 5 types of special equipment.

Besides offerings and show equipment for *ngaruat* ceremony, in *wayang* show, there are also several steps that need to be done including reading/reciting *kidung* or *raja* by the puppet master which is intended for *Batara* character. The mantra (*raja/kidung*) is a symbol of cleansing which is meant for eliminating every misfortune which exist inside the *sukerta*.

3.3 Ritual Process

The complete ritual process starts with a presentation of *sesajen* (offerings) in front of the venue (*wayang*, *pantun*, *beluk*). The *sukertas* seat

around the venue or near *sasajen* wearing a white fabric (*ihrom*). Then, *dalang* (puppet master) starts telling *Cerita Batara Kala* which includes the reading of *raja/kidung* intended for (the body of) *wayang Batara Kala*. During that time, *wayang Batara Kala* is veiled with white fabric. After the play finished, *dalang* chants a mantra to the *sukerta*'s body/nape and then bathe him/her by pouring the *sukerta*'s head with flower water. When being bathed, *sukerta* wears usual clothing veiled with white fabric. After that, all the clothing used during *ngaruat* ceremony must be disposed or submitted to *dalang*. Also, all offerings have to be submitted to *dalang*.

Ngaruat ceremony through *wayang* (*CBK*) starts during midnight or predawn and must be finished before daybreak. During the *Batara Kala* play, there are some rules for the audience including prohibition to go home or leave the venue before the story is finished and prohibition to not going to sleep or feel sleepy. The mythical reason is that if someone goes home in the middle of the show, they will be eaten by *Batara Kala* on the way'. Some opinions, says that it is meant for all attendees' sake, so that they can enjoy the whole story in the show. Furthermore, the reason is that everyone can recite prayers presented in the mantra or *kidung/raja*.

3.4 Symbolic Meanings

Humans use language, clothing, ideas, moral values, and life norms; all of them are the product of symbolized behaviors. In this case, symbols can be defined as expressions of wisdom, born and applied in daily life of a particular society.

As a generally traditional society, *Tatar Sunda*'s society (especially in the past) also has traditional wisdom applied in their daily lives, for example taboos or prohibitions. Prohibition or taboo is sometimes disclosed in the forms of idioms. These prohibitions have particular positive purposes and aims, but they are not delivered in transparency. One of the ritual traditions loaded with symbols and/or traditional wisdoms is *NT* which has these following implicit meanings:

3.4.1 *Ngaruat*

Ngaruat: Possess meanings of releasing, eliminating, and/or getting rid of something bad/evil from within humans. There is an opinion that phonetically, *ngaruat* is identical with the word *ngarawat* (*merawat*); which means taking care of.

All meanings contained in the term *ngaruat* refer to its purpose for achieving life salvation.

3.4.2 *Sukerta*

Sukerta which consists of four groups is considered as a misfortunate person so that his/her life is threatened by disastrous matters. Accordingly, misfortunes have to be released or eliminated from within him-/herself so that his/her life is safe and prosperous. If it is explored or analyzed thoroughly, these four groups have psychological problems in their life so that their life journeys do not run smoothly or normally. Thus, NT is a traditional psychotherapy used by people in the past so that the *sukertas* can lead a fair life.

3.4.3 *Cerita Batara Kala*

Cerita Batara Kala: The central character of this act is *Batara Kala*, son of *Batara Guru* (from Dewi Tanana and/or Dewi Uma), who is born unexpectedly due to *Batara Guru*'s irrepressible lust. *Batara Kala* has a malicious character and is fond of consuming human flesh. This can be a lesson for people that having an intercourse cannot be done with a random person and even though it is done with one's own wife, it still needs to be done ethically by considering the place and time.

Like the other *wayang* characters which are symbolized by physical appearance (color, head and eye gestures, and so on), *Batara Kala*'s figure, which can be considered as a giant, is enough to indicate greedy, fierce/evil, and voracious.

The word *kala* derives from Sanskrit which means *time*; this term *kala* also implies a meaning that humans need to remember about time and has to make use of time for positive things so that their lives are always in salvation. Storyteller or *dalang* (puppeteer) as the symbol of Life's most sovereign.

3.4.4 *Ruatan Equipment and Offerings*

Ruatan Equipment and Offerings: Essentially, the function of offerings is to be a means or something that bonds the importance of food, household furniture, farming tools, plants, pets, vegetation, and so on. The presence of offerings reminds humans that, essentially, humans' life is inseparable with their natural surroundings as a means to undergo their daily lives.

Another thing that needs to be explored concerning the offerings is terms or vocabularies of the offerings. In the group of plants, there is a *jukut palias* and *sulangkar*. In Sundanese, *palias* means

amit-amit or "God forbid"; this word is used to refer to something gross, scary; so that no one would want to do or experience it. *Palias* plant can be an ointment (*lulur*) after being pulverized.

There is also a term called *kapaliasan* which means a mantra to repel misfortunes. Meanwhile, *sulangkar* is an acronym of *sulaya* and *ingkar*, both of them mean that human, when leading their life, cannot break/escape from norms. Regarding the *sulangkar* plant, this plant (perhaps) scientifically possesses a property that can be made use of by humans because our ancestors has decided to make the plant as an offering and they could not be reckless about it, instead they chose it with a clear significance. This supposition has to be proven by laboratory tests to *sulangkar* plant. In the food group, there is a *ketupat* (a type of dumpling made from rice packed inside a diamond-shaped container of woven palm leaf pouch) named *kupat salamet* and *kupat tangtang angin*; linguistically, it is clear that these *ketupat* dishes are prayers of salvation (*salamet*) and antidotes of dangers symbolized by the words *tangtang angin* (challenging the wind). Likewise, offerings in the water group consist of water taken from the river and it is called *cai mulang*. River is a symbol of human life which runs like a river flowing through the creek, a final destination (*mulang*). Water is a symbol for humans to make meaning of, especially for the ones that need to be *ruat-ed*.

3.4.5 *Ruatan Mantra or Rajah/Kidung*

Ruatan Mantra or Rajah/Kidung: Reciting this mantra is a symbol in releasing and banishing the misfortunes inside the *sukerta*'s body so that he/she can be pure from all the things that block salvation. *Batara Kala*'s body is actually the symbol of all body limbs of someone that is being *ruat-ed* at that time. *Rajah/kidung* in *ngaruat* ceremony also means: apologies to the God for all the mistakes, prayers for salvation in leading a life, and casting out entities that disturb human's life.

From the discussion regarding the components and structure of *ngaruat* with CBK, it was revealed that the tradition is a symbol of Sundanese values and views of life which consist of: (1) humans as individuals (symbolized by the ego of *Batara Kala* character); (2) humans with nature (symbolized by the offerings); (3) humans with their social environment (symbolized by the clothing and taboos); (4) humans with God (symbolized by the presence of *dalang* or puppet master and special equipment), and (5) humans and their desire to

pursue inner satisfaction (symbolized by the mantra/*kidung*).

4 CONCLUSIONS

Ngaruat Tradition (NT) is also a product of the development of a culture that shows a variety of steps in Indonesian culture; and has a silver lining between each step. Ceremonially, *ngaruat* ceremony is oftentimes conducted during cultural events, nowadays. Even though there have been many changes, in the frame of preserving the culture, this is a chance to preserve and develop NT as a product of a culture which is useful for science and society as:

- Source of research for a study of: local languages (including dictionary making), literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology, biology, ethics/morality, religious systems, arts, and history of the development of culture;
- Source in humanities education;
- The result of the study towards components of NT probably can be revitalized for the sake of empowerment of people's economy, for example to become one of the packaging (model) of cultural product for the benefit of tourism.

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