

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN AND NATURE AS AN ECOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION BEHIND THE SACRED MYTH OF *BUMBUM*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the relationship between humans and the nature as represented in the mythical narrative of a tree called the sacred of *Bumbum*. The background of this research is the importance of bringing back the local wisdom values of the community, especially in the old Malay villages in Riau Island, which are increasingly marginalized. As a form of folk narrative, myth is an integral part of the oral literary component. To bridge literature with people's behavior, researchers used a literary anthropological approach (Vayda, 1968). While the relationship between humans and nature could be studied with an ecological approach. This research is descriptive-qualitative in nature, namely the method used to explain the condition of a system of thought or events in the present and then make a description in a systematic, factual, and accurate manner regarding the factors, nature, and relationships between the phenomena being investigated. The ecological bond between humans and the environment is reflected through: 1) the prohibition of cutting down trees; 2) the prohibition of picking leaves and tree trunks; and 3) the prohibition of defecating around trees. These forms of prohibition reflect the ecological relations of mythical discourse, which imply existence, attachment, and concern that are not just silent but live and must be kept in harmony with one another.

Keywords: Myths, ecology, human and environmental relations, local wisdom

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is motivated by the importance of bringing back the local wisdom values of the community, especially in the old Malay village of

Batam. The rapid development of industry, reclamation, landfilling, logging of forests for settlements, and industrial waste had a significant

impact on the preservation of nature, the environment, and the ecosystems in it. Migration of people outside Batam on a large scale due to the magnetism of employment and industrialization has exacerbated environmental damage. On the other hand, the Malay community, as the first inhabitants since the 231st century AD, was marginalized in remote areas and even directly felt the impact of environmental damage (arianto, et al. 2020).

According to research findings from the BPPT Environmental Technology Center, industrial waste-related water quality pollution in the reservoir region next to the Batamindo Duriangan industry in 1992–2000 varied from 34.70 mg/l to 268.4 mg/l (Haryadi, 2006). On the one hand, rapid economic growth has also led to inequalities, particularly in areas near industries where there is environmental harm (hinterland). Due to globalization and rapid industrialisation, the glory of the Malay Malays that was immortalized in the tale of Hang Nadim throughout the 1960s decade is being relegated to the background more and more. The fact that Malaysians still uphold steadfast customs and regional knowledge is the secret to their glory. The Malay Gurindam line exemplifies this. *Bila habis latar sang hutan berdiri alam lestari tinggal idaman yang lari*

Pollution of water, air pollution, logging of forests and hills on a large scale is very detrimental to the preservation of nature and the ecosystems in it. This is due to low public awareness or laws that are not in favor of local culture (Rahmawati, 2014). One of the efforts to restore

public awareness of environmental and natural sustainability is by upholding local wisdom and traditions. Keramat old Malay village Nongsa Batam is a cultural site that is very rich in local wisdom values contained therein, especially the relationship between humans and nature.

The people of the old Malay nongsa village still believe in the mythical stories behind this sacred place so that no one dares to evict, move or destroy it. The sacred *Bumbum*, sacred *Puak*, and sacred *batu belah* which are located in the south of the Nongsa sub-district have been preserved until now. The Malay village community still adheres to local traditions, religious rituals and local culture. This is what inspires researchers to reintroduce and explore more deeply how humans and the natural environment are connected to each other so that harmony is established between the two in an ecological framework.

The narrative approach is used to explore the mythical stories behind the existence of the three sacred Nongsa old villages. To bridge literature with people's behavior, researchers use a literary anthropological approach. While the relationship between humans and nature can be studied with an ecological approach. This research is descriptive qualitative in nature, namely the method used to explain the condition of a system of thought or events in the present and then make a description, description, in a systematic, factual and accurate manner regarding the factors, nature, and relationships between the phenomena being investigated. The informants of this study were natives

of the Batam Malay old village community in Nongsa including the sacred caretakers of the *Bumbum*, *Puak*, and *Batubelah*; the advice of the Malay community, and the younger generation of native Malay nongsa.

Methods of data collection using observation techniques and in-depth interviews. Observation techniques are carried out by observing and being directly involved in the activities of the Malay old village community. This was also supported by structured interviews with informants, by asking questions that had been prepared beforehand. The results of observations and interview transcripts will be abstracted so that they become data ready for analysis. In conducting data analysis must pay attention to research variables, namely; (1) Study of the narrative structure of the old Malay village sacred myth and (2) Ecological wisdom with an ecological approach behind the myth.

Mythical stories cannot be separated from studies in oral literature. According to Sarkki, et al (2018) Myth is the expression and giving identity to certain values as a marker of meaning that is believed and held firmly. Meanwhile, according to Taum (2011) oral literature is oral testimony in the form of messages, stories from generation to generation. So clearly myth is part of oral literature. To examine the relationship between people's behavior and literature, researchers used an ecological approach.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecological studies are the subject matter in the analysis of human interaction and the natural

environment. The representation of human and nature interaction is reflected in various myths behind historical places in Batam. This place is known as sacred or sacred tombs in the old village of Nongsa. The sacred object of research data in this article is the sacred Bunbun. This sacred place still exists in the midst of modernization and industrialization in Batam. Even though there have been repeated attempts to move it, it always fails to happen. Thus, the Nongsa Malay community believes that there are various prohibitions that cannot be violated behind this sacred existence. These prohibitions become a discussion for researchers who can be analyzed from an ecological perspective. All of these prohibitions are inseparable from maintaining human behavior to respect nature, protecting the environment, and ethical behavior.

a. Myth as part of Oral Literature

Oral literature is literature that includes literary expressions that are passed down and spread orally (Zaimar, 2008). Taum (2011) further explained that the main element of oral literature is aesthetics. Taum added that oral literature expresses the collective awareness of the local community (mentifact) regarding their lives, customs and beliefs. Myth itself according to Sarkki, et al (2018) is the disclosure and giving of identity to certain values as a marker of meaning that is believed and held firmly. Myths are conveyed through oral stories of their predecessors from generation to generation and then incarnated in obedience and submission to their existence. Referring to the previous

concept of oral literature, it is clear that myth is an integral part of the study of oral literature.

a. The Ecology in Myth

To bring together literature and people's behavior can be bridged by using a literary anthropological approach. Ratna (2013) explains that society is part of literature, as a background, as well as the recipient of the creation itself. Talking about community literature will also talk about the culture formed by the community environment in it. Poyatos (1998) provides several things that bring together anthropological and literary studies including; (1) anthropology and literature pay attention to human aspects as actors; (2) Humans as cultured social beings; (3) there are many oral discourses and oral literature that connect anthropological and literary studies. One of the anthropological studies that can explore the relationship between humans and the environment can be studied with an ecological approach. In his life, humans cannot be separated from the environment in which they live, one of which is the physical natural environment. This environment is still natural with all its ecosystems and has not been touched by human hands. In relation to this environment, humans will interpret it and be reflected in the culture that then emerges. That's why ecology is very concerned about exploring the values and meanings contained in human behavior, especially behavior that reflects the conservation of the natural environment. This is in line with what was expressed by Malionwski (2014): to grasp the

native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world.

Vayda (1968) believed that humans and their culture are largely determined by the conditions of the natural environment. Conversely, the phenomenon of a human culture can be studied by relating it to the natural environment in which humans and the culture live. The approach in ecology which is also known as geographical determinism or ethnographical environmentalism has the view that environmental conditions have a very large role in shaping the culture of an ethnic group.

While Steward (2003) said that environment and culture are not two different things. Steward's cultural ecological theory states that environment and culture cannot be separated and both are a mixture that processes through a reciprocal relationship. If previously it was explained that the environment plays an important role in shaping the culture of society, then actually the culture that develops in society also plays a very important role in the continued existence of an environment. Thus the concept of ecology can be used to see the meaning of society towards the environment as a form of adaptation that gives rise to their conservative behaviors towards the natural environment.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted by conducting interviews with informants in Nongsa old village, Batam, Riau Islands. The data collection technique used in this study is adjusted to the data source. Data sources for this research are primary and secondary

data. Primary data was obtained using field observation and in-depth interview techniques, both in person and online. Observations as the way to deeping the data source. So the researchers drew the theme of the discussion around the ecology behind the mythical stories of Sacred *Bumbum* toward the Nongsa Malay Community in Batam. In in-depth interviews, the questions asked have been prepared before so that they are more focused and in-depth. This interview was conducted to obtain information about the object of research. In this case, the interviews were addressed to informants who were selected because they were considered to know the ins and outs of the research object. In addition to primary data, this research also uses secondary data obtained from the results of literature studies. This literature study includes scientific writing about the object of study and other relevant reading sources such as journals, books, newspapers, magazines, and articles. The informants of this study were natives of the Batam Malay old village community in Nongsa, including the sacred caretakers of the *Bumbum*; the advice of the Malay community; and the younger generation of native Malay nongsa.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forest and Human ecology bond in the Sacred of *Bumbum*

The Sacred of *Bumbum* is a legacy of Habib Nuh in the form of a tree that grows from coconut fiber and has grown since the 12th century or hundreds of years ago. This tree should not be cut down or moved because it is believed to be mystical in it. Habib Noh

is a smart and religious person and has the ability to act as an intermediary between humans and God to treat various diseases and avoid disaster. In order for the community to maintain nature, Habib Nuh left a sacred place by planting trees that grow from coconut fiber. This tree has grown hundreds of years old but no one can even move or cut down the tree.

The ethnoecological element reflected in the existence of the tree is represented by the existence of oral traditions in the form of prohibitions regarding the existence of the tree. Researchers can summarize these prohibitions in the following descriptions:

- a. Prohibition of cutting down the sacred tree

Malay community informants in interviews provide an overview of the origins of sacredbumum. The existence of sacred bumim forms an interrelated interaction between humans and nature. *Bumbum* as a representation of nature implies an existence that is not only silent but still alive and must be maintained in harmony with one another. This was described in the discussion with Atuk Wah as follows:

Bumbum asalnya dari serabot kelape yang sengaja di tanam oleh Habeb Noh orang yang pandai lagi taat. Banyak masyarakat yang hendak berziarah untuk mendapatkan berkat Sang Kuase melalui perantare Sang Habeb. Pokok keramat ini tak boleh di tebang, sebab ini sebagai umpama bentuk perantare manusie alam dan jugak Tuhan.

The quote provides an understanding that *Bumbum* represents the existence of Habib Nuh which is believed by the people to continue to live in every life. This tree has lived hundreds of years. No one and anyone can cut down or move the existence of this tree. This is further clarified by excerpts from the follow-up interview with Atuk Wah that the community believes that the form of Habib Noh is still etched in the rubble.

The longing for obedience and honesty makes people inseparable from the figure of the habib. That is why the monument to the growth of the Bubumm tree cannot be separated from the existence of the figure of Habib Noh. Nobody knows where Habib Noh is buried, some believe he is buried in the sacred Bubum. Some believe that he had moved and was buried in the sacred *Bumbum* on Malaysian soil.



Figures 1 and 2. The sacred of *Bumbum* and the place for offerings on the edge of the Nongsa beach

b. The prohibition to cut down the leaves and the tree trunks

The societal phenomenon is a phenomenon of human social relations, which is the most important thing in the analysis of ethnoecology, because the focus of the study of ethnoecology is humans interacting with nature. With knowledge of socio-anthropological literature, the relationship between humans that maintains the harmonization of its natural curves can explain the interrelation of the existence of the two relationships which are interrelated with one another. It is with this interaction that prohibitions

to limit humans destroy the harmony of the relationship between nature and humans. This is also implied in the following excerpt from the interview with the caretaker:

*Sudah banyak orang yang hendak memusnahkan keberadaan keramat bumbum, namun usehe pemusnahan tesebot selalu saje gagal. Kalau tak silaf, **anak dari perusahaan citratubindo** batam yang hendak melakukan perluasan lahan dan pemindahan keberadaan keramat bumbum, banyak kali di lakukan selalu saje tak bise. Alhamdulillah, keramat bumbum*

*tetap saje wujud dan tetap
tejage kelestariannya dari sifat
tamak manusia.*

The above prohibition is understood by some people as a myth whose truth could have happened by chance. However, in ethnoecological studies, the most important thing is not coincidence or not. But how myths shape people's behavior especially has an element of mutually caring interaction between humans and nature. Hilamanto (2010) states that ethnoecology underlies the analysis of all aspects of behavior that are functionally interconnected in uncertain ways between humans and nature. This supports the statement that the relationship between the prohibition of picking leaves or even cutting down trees and the occurrence of disease as a result has a functional relationship that cannot be explained logically. But in fact, human ability not to destroy nature is a reflection of the existence of this myth.

c. Prohibition of defecation around the tree

Another prohibition is related to sacred bumim, namely that it is forbidden to urinate or defecate anywhere. This is also reflected in excerpts from additional conversations with the informant's wife who is also a native Malay as follows:

*Usah sesekali buang ae kecik
ataupun buang ae besa di
sekeliling keramat bumbum,
sebab itu tempat suci yang tak
boleh di kotori. Padahalnye nanti
boleh kualat jike mengotori
tempat tersebut.*

The relationship between humans and religious ethical morality is also an integral part of the study of ethnoecology. Gasouka, et al (2013) explained that from a religious point of view through natural phenomena by establishing sacred places (cemeteries, temples, historical places) and exploring taboos and prohibitions as part of the study space. Likewise with the attitude of respecting holy places not only as part of myths but also the existence of nature, religion and the social ethics of the people who shape them.

There are many other prohibitions that cannot be explained one by one in this regard, such as the prohibition to laugh out loud around sacred places, the prohibition on moving trees or cutting down, the prohibition on speaking dirty around sacred places, and the prohibition on bad intentions using sacred things. All of these community behaviors can clearly be drawn in ethnoecological studies by connecting human and natural relations through their activities.

4. CONCLUSION

The glittering progress of the industrialization of the city of Batam turns out to save various historical relics, one of which is the sacred form of Malay historical heritage. Keramat Bunbun is a relic of Habib Nuh, a person who was glorified for his good behavior towards the Malay community in the 12th century or hundreds of years ago. The interesting thing that the researchers found was the existence of a sacred tree in the form of an old tree that is still well preserved even though the tree has

been repeatedly moved or cut down. From the theoretical studies conducted, the researchers drew several forms of prohibition which reflect the ecological relationship between the ban on cutting down trees for humans and the environment. Researchers found that there are three tomb locations that still exist in the old nongsa Malay village, namely the sacred of *Bumbum*. This research attempts to dismantle the ethnological representations of the three historical places with the attitudes of the people that are formed. All of these community behaviors are essentially inseparable from the bond of maintaining the harmony of humans and nature.

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