

Traditional Ceremony as a Development Communication Medium

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Abstract— *The Seren taun ceremony in Kasepuhan Banten Kidul is a form of reflection of gratitude towards the Almighty over abundant crops. In addition, these traditional rituals are also a place of friendship between indigenous members and stakeholders from the village to the central level.*

During the ceremony, there was a dialogue session between the parties and the stakeholders regarding various social issues faced. The indigenous people represented by the customary leader convey their aspirations in the form of complaints, hopes, and demands from the community to the government, while the stakeholders respond to issues that arise, as well as convey various development agendas and programs, both for the interests of the indigenous people and for society in general.

In the context of social change and development, the use of seren taun as a means of dialogue between indigenous people and stakeholders can be understood as a form of social action that has a specific purpose, namely the hope of emerging government attention so that they can feel the positive impact of development. Therefore, this study intends to focus on questions; how seren taun is used as a medium of customary communication with the government, and how the implications for social change and development along with the use of traditional activities as a medium of communication with the government. To answer this question, this research with a qualitative approach and ethnomethodology method uses the theory of social action as an analysis knife.

Keywords: *Traditional Ceremony, Seren Taun, Kasepuhan Banten Kidul, Social Change and Development*

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional ceremonies carried out by indigenous people in various regions in Indonesia, not only function as cultural activities, or spiritual activities for indigenous people, but also have the function of increasing community social solidarity, eliminating attention to individual interests, and strengthening religious life [1]. Thus, in that context, traditional ceremonies have a function as a communication medium, not only as spiritual, but also as social communication. In fact, it can further be used as a communication medium for social change and development.

One of the traditional ceremonies which is also a medium of communication for social change and development is the traditional ceremony held by the traditional Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community, namely people living in parts of West Java and Banten that depend on agricultural products (agrarian societies).

The term seren taun come from a Sundanese words, seren, which means to hand over, to pass over, or to give up, and taun that means year. So Seren taun means hand over a year ago to the year to come as a replacement. In the context of the traditional life of the Sundanese farming community, Seren Taun is a vehicle to thank God Almighty for all

agricultural products this year, while hoping that their agricultural output will increase in the coming year [2].

In one of the empires in Lebak Regency, namely Kasepuhan Cisungsang, the seren taun ceremony is routinely held every year. In addition to being grateful, this traditional ceremony is also interpreted as a form of their existence. Therefore, this activity is not only aimed at the community of Kasepuhan, but also open to the public, where the interests of all of them come from efforts so that the existence of tradition is recognized and gets the attention of all parties, especially from the state.

For the sake of recognition and attention for Kasepuhan, every seren taun ritual, Kasepuhan party always invites its main stakeholders and the government from the central to the regional level. The presence of both of them, not only represents the state but also gives recognition to the existence of Kasepuhan.

As it is known, the 1945 Constitution recognizes the existence of indigenous people in Indonesia. Article 18B paragraph 2 states that "The State recognizes and respects the customary law community unit along with their traditional rights insofar as they are alive and in accordance with the development of society and the principle of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which is regulated by Law."

However, even though its existence is recognized by the State and has equal rights in the eyes of the law, most indigenous people in Indonesia are still faced with various problems. Among other things are the problem of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment due to the lack of access to development in the areas where they live.

Even so, from the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul indigenous people, namely the Sundanese indigenous groups in the Mount Halimun Salak National Park area and spread in Lebak Regency, Banten Province, and Sukabumi District and Bogor Regency, West Java Province, many of them have not been touched by development which results in limited access to education, health and welfare in general.

The continuation of the seren taun activities which are able to present the stakeholders in each of their implementation is inseparable from the role of the traditional leader. As a cultural figure and supreme leader of the Kasepuhan community, the customary leader is not only able to maintain and preserve the cultural identity of the community through the annual rituals, but also makes the traditional institution a seren taun ceremony as an important and strategic communication medium for dialogue between tradition and the state [3]. In this case, the seren taun

ceremony as well as a cultural space is also a communication medium for social change and development.

That the customary leader has such an important role in his community, is something that cannot be denied, and does not only apply to the Banten Kidul community. However, it applies generally to other indigenous people. Fransiskus Xav Ndiwa in his research on Customary Institutions, Opinion Leaders in Local Political Development, Case Studies of the Role of Customary and Mosadaki Institutions as Opinion Leaders in Local Political Development in Nagekeo District, East Nusa Tenggara, mentioning that customary leaders or traditional leaders have great influence for the community [4]. In his research also mentioned that customary institutions and mosadaki play a role in local political development, planning and implementation of development programs especially in the field of local politics, especially for authorities in terms of policy makers and can contribute ideas to the opinion leader (mosadaki) in rural as community communicators and role models in socializing development communication values to the community.

In a development perspective, what is initiated by the customary leader in making seren taun as a space for dialogue is the role as an actor or agent of change (agent of change) that has a continuing role as stated by Havelock [5], namely as catalyst, solution provider or problem solver, helps in the process of change and dissemination of innovation, and becomes a link (linker) with the resources needed to solve problems faced by the community. Whereas in the communication perspective it is referred to as a communicator, because its role, among others, is to communicate the agenda of change or development to interested parties. It functions as a chain of communication between two or more social systems. Namely connecting between a social system that pioneered this change with the social system that became the client in the effort to change it.

The role of the customary leader as a communicator and chain of communication between tradition and the government through the activities of seren taun is synchronized with the notion of development communication in general, which includes the role and function of communication (as reciprocal message exchange activities) among all parties involved in development efforts, especially between the community and the government, starting from the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of development [5].

Whereas in the perspective of the theory of social action, the efforts made by the tradition leader along with other customary tools in making seren taun as a cultural space as well as a communication medium for social change and development are forms of conscious action to achieve certain goals. Also called rational action.

Rationality is the basic concept used by Weber in his classification of the types of social actions in the process of social transformation. Weber divides 4 (four) forms of the ideal type of social action, namely: action based on value-rationality, actions based on instrumental rationality (means and rational), affective (affectual) actions, and traditional (traditional) actions [6]. In this case, Weber asserts that not

all human actions are social actions. An action is only referred to as a social action when considering the behavior of others and being oriented towards the behavior of others. Thus, social action is human behavior that has subjective meanings for behavior. In another sense social action relates to conscious and choice considerations that the actions are expressed.

In connection with the background above, research using the ethnomethodology method would focus on questions; how seren taun is used as a medium of customary communication with the government, and how the implications for social change and development along with the use of these traditional activities as a medium of communication with the government.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research was designed according to the interpretive paradigm with the aim of trying to systematically analyze meaningful social action through observation in detail and directly in a natural setting, in order to gain understanding and interpretation about the way people create and maintain their social world [7]. In the context of communication studies, the purpose of research with the interpretive paradigm is to understand human communication behavior.

The method used in this study is ethnomethodology. This method places humans as subjects who have the ability to construct a social world based on their strength to interpret. In this case, social actors interpret situations from their actions, range of goals, and other motivations to obtain intersubjective understanding and coordinate their actions and generally direct their social world [8].

In other words, based on ethnomethodological perspectives, 'social facts' are created because of interpretive actions from each member of the community - activities that become a vehicle for actors to produce and organize conditions in daily life itself. Ethnomethodology studies pay attention to conversation analysis (conversation analysis), with the aim to understand in detail the fundamental structure of conversation interactions [9]. Therefore, according to this method, there is a social fact that is not only interpreted as a traditional ritual but also has other meanings and benefits, namely as a medium of customary communication with the government for the benefit of community development.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. *Seren Taun as a Development Communication Medium*

In general, indigenous people in Banten, depend on land or plant crops. This is inseparable from the history of those who from the beginning had constructed themselves as cultivators as well as environmentalists. Because of that, they are very respectful of the land, where land is the place to grow rice, a source of human food. The symbolic form of their respect for the land is, among others, expressed through traditional ceremonies, seren taun. This ritual is held once a year, aimed at honoring and worshiping Dewi Padi, Nyi Pohaci Sang Hyang Sri, daughter of Dewi Anta. For them, rice is an embodiment of superhuman strength which symbolizes fertility. Therefore, rice must be glorified and treated as well as possible with respect to respectable

daughters and possessing magical powers, both in the process of planting seeds, maintaining plants, harvesting stems and storing them in barns.

Seren Taun as a whole is led by the customary leader, commonly called "Abah", assisted by *rendangan* (a term for family representatives who are tasked to become the mouthpiece of traditional leaders and the community) and a committee formed specifically for the seren taun ceremony. This ceremony is usually carried out after the harvest period, while for the determination of time, it is done by calculating the Sundanese traditional calendar.

In an indigenous perspective, some activities from Seren Taun are a form of ritual activity to reaffirm their commitment to their traditions and culture. Thus, even though most of them live outside of Kasepuhan, the identity of the Kasepuhan community is not lost, because through the seren taun they are reminded of the nature of their selfhood. Through ritual activities in the seren taun, they also allow them various emotional commitments, to become the glue for their cohesion, as well as a form of devotion to their customs and culture.

Based on this, the community considers it important even feel obliged to continue to maintain, care for, and preserve the traditions of the people, as a medium of communication between them as an effort to confirm the identity of the community of Kasepuhan. Conversely, the absence of seren taun will not only erode their cultural identity as a community of kasepuhan, but also will accelerate the loss of that cultural identity from the face of the earth. They simply call Seren Taun a form of friendship. Without seren taun there will be no friendship. So through seren taun the relationship between *incu putu* (members of the community of Kasepuhan, pen.) Is maintained, and by itself the traditional traditions and their cultural identities are maintained.

In addition, along with the changing times since a dozen years ago, seren taun activities in Kasepuhan Cisungsang have undergone changes in terms of packaging. This activity is no longer only intended as an inner ritual activity, in the sense that it is only intended for the community of Kasepuhan itself, but also outward, so that it is open to people outside Kasepuhan, not only reflective-evaluative but also contestative-recreational.

The seren taun rituals that were so contested by the kasepuhan party were also understood as part of customary strategies in order to gain recognition for their existence. Through a series of people, the Kasepuhan community wants to show their existence as a society that still adheres to the values of wisdom in farming, makes nature a source of life and livelihood that must be maintained, cared for, and protected, because their clothing and food depend entirely on nature. .

Not only shows the existence of a society that has food security because it is able to maintain the balance of the environment, through seren taun, the community of Kasepuhan wants to assert themselves that they are not a closed and exclusive society, but a society that is open, polite, friendly, respectful and has high respect towards other guests and visitors, as an embodiment of the principle

of Caring (*Silih Asih*), Reminding (*Silih Asah*), and beloved each other (*Silih Asuh*).

Because Seren taun is a means of demonstrating the existence of tradition, so seren taun is also a space for dialogue between indigenous people represented by tradition leaders with government and other stakeholders. Based on that, every implementation of seren taun is always prepared and well planned and invites various parties to come and attend with the aim of the recognition of the existence of the community of Kasepuhan. The dialogue between the community and the government usually takes place at the peak of the event and is named "*the Sarasehan for the Residents of Kasepuhan Sareng Pamarentah*".

For the community of Kasepuhan, the interest of all of that is due to efforts to ensure that the existence of tradition is recognized by all parties, especially by the state. For the sake of recognition, every event held by the party from Kasepuhan always invites the main stakeholders of the government. This is done in view of the conditions of marginalization that they have experienced so far due to various regulations made by the state that are impartial so as to cause inequality and underdevelopment. On this basis, every activity held by the Kasepuhan party invites government elements from the central to regional levels.

The presence of the state apparatus in every seren taun activity is considered as something important in order to strengthen their cultural identity so that its existence is recognized and even legitimized by the State, on the grounds that the community of Kasepuhan is an inseparable part of the state. Thus, the government can also take into account the existence of indigenous people as a whole. The statement about the need for state regulation on indigenous people as a form of recognition and protection of the state against the existence of tradition conveyed by the kasepuhan in every seren taun is a concrete example of indigenous communication with the government.

B. Implications for Development and Social Change

The Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community is an indigenous community that has a principle of Caring (*Silih Asih*), Reminding (*Silih Asah*), and beloved each other (*Silih Asuh*). Another principle that they hold tightly is the doctrine of life balance which they call "*tilu sapamilu, two sakarupa, hiji eta keneh*". This expression is interpreted as "three faces or concurrent, two similar, one that is also", which means, even though there are many desires and various kinds of traits, in essence human beings come from one essential origin, namely Allah Subhanahu wa ta'ala. "*Tilu Sapamilu*" is religion, tradition, and government that must go hand in hand. "*Two Sakarupa*", namely tradition and religion must run parallel. While "*Nu Hiji Eta Keneh*" means everything must refer to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). This expression then teaches indigenous people the concept of balance or harmony in living life, namely between religion, tradition, and obligations as citizens.

The two principles become the foundation for the Kasepuhan community in their attitude and actions, including in establishing communication with the government regarding various problems faced to achieve common understanding and commitment which could lead

to the issuance of regulations concerning the recognition and existence of indigenous people, including the development of government. The medium used is traditional ritual activities *seren taun*. In this event, a space for dialogue between the Kasepuhan parties represented by the customary chair was established which included an invitation and pressure to stakeholders so that they would support and commit to pay attention to the fate experienced by the Kasepuhan community.

The customary leader as a spokesperson for Kasepuhan in every dialogue with stakeholders always voiced the interests of indigenous people in Kasepuhan Banten Kidul. The problem that he consistently voiced from the series to *Seren Taun* was the question of the existence of indigenous communities in all Banten Kidul neighborhoods that needs special attention and the importance of preserving the customs of all parties.

The positive results and implications obtained from the dialogue activities that are always held in every activity of the year, are the emergence of various concerns from the government, both in the form of policies, and in the form of legal recognition of their existence, as well as in development policies oriented to the interests of indigenous people. Among other things, the issuance of the Regent's Decree regarding the Recognition of the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul Community in 2013 and the enactment of Perda No. 08 of 2015 concerning the Kasepuhan Indigenous People of Banten Kidul.

In addition to containing recognition, protection and empowerment of the Kasepuhan Customary Law Community, the Regional Regulation which consists of 11 chapters and 26 articles, also opens opportunities for the Kasepuhan community to have their own government system in the form of tradition village government, which is regulated through regulations, often with the issuance of the Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages (Chapter III Article 8).

In addition to the issuance of regulations concerning the recognition and protection of indigenous people, the positive impact of development is also increasingly felt by indigenous people. The program for repairing and hardening roads leading to customary residential areas, electricity lighting, construction of school buildings and the procurement of other facilities and infrastructure needed, is carried out by the government, both local government and the central government. Likewise with various community empowerment programs from various ministries and from other institutions such as NGOs including companies in the form of activities based on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

IV. CONCLUSION

The use of traditional ceremonies such as *seren taun* as a means of dialogue with stakeholders is a form of social action. So, in this context traditional ceremonies have a function as a communication medium that is not only spiritual, but also as a communication medium for social change and development. Thus, as stated by Weber, the act

of utilizing *seren taun* as a communication medium is a conscious action oriented to the emergence of the response of other parties to the action. Therefore, in a social action perspective, one who is also used as a space for dialogue with stakeholders is the result of social action based on value-rational action or non-nationality, not instrumental rationality which is based more dominantly on materialistic interests and choice-oriented rationality - the most favorable choice, not affectual behavior done based on feelings, or traditional actions based on habits, without conscious reflection or planning.

The dialogue that takes place in each region has positive implications because it is one of the drivers of the emergence of government policies in the form of legal products in the form of recognition, protection and empowerment of indigenous communities through regional regulations, including the inclusion of various physical development programs and empowerment by the government for the community tradition. In other words, the positive response of policy makers and other parties is the fruit of social actions or rational actions.

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