

# An Analysis of Traditional Ritual “*Persentabin*”

Iwan Setiawan Tarigan

Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung, Indonesia ✉ (e-mail): [iwanstarigan@gmail.com](mailto:iwanstarigan@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This research belongs to qualitative research which is dealing with theology scope about *persentabin*, a traditional ritual at Lau Kawar lake Kuta Gugung village, Naman Teran district, Karo Regency. The study aims to find out the background of the ritual, the meaning of ritual, and the chains of the process of *persentabin* ritual. Technique of data gathering used was by observation and interview, using purposive sampling technique. The informants of the research were village leader, the head of BKAG, the division head of Christian society Guidance of Karo regency, Indonesia. It was found that the background for the citizen to have *persentabin* ritual was the eruption of Sinabung mountain. The citizen around the village believe that the eruption was happened caused of bad treatment of the people around and tourists who destruct or bad treating against the environment wherein is believed that many souls are live around.

**Keywords:** *persentabin* ritual, Theologous (religious) analysis, soul of human

## Introduction

An unforgettable memory by August 2010 for the society of Karo of which Sinabung mountain was erupting. The society around believe that Sinabung mountain has not been erupted and even is not a kind of active volcanic mountain for a long time, that is why they were shock when it was happened at that time. Soon after the eruption happened in 2010, all the fortune-tellers (*sibaso*) were busy to conduct ritual extensively and frequently. *Sibaso* is a person who is trusted able to predict or fortunetelling, able to see spirit, soul, ghost and treating them as well, able to manage ritual to well-settled them so that they hopefully not disturbing the human anymore. Several days after the eruption, all of them were busy to attend *persentabin* ritual leading by *Sibaso*, it was done in the river and pools that they believed that there were the soul to whom they dedicated the ritual. They prepared a white goat and cow as a symbol of their harvest they offer for the souls, the most concentrated ritual they have always done at Kawar Lake, Kuta Gugung village, Naman Teran district Karo regency. yang berada persis di kaki Gunung Sinabung.

Actually, *Persentabin* ritual is a means of procession to maintain to bridge a balance between local culture with environment where they live around. Karo tribe believes that the nature and the environment functioning is not only for human being to live but also for other God's creators including souls which are not eye-catched but believed only or mind-catched. The procession of the ritual is managed and scheduled by *si Baso*. Whilst the procession, firstly *si Baso* move Nini Karo to the former place, having dancing together with the followers, then shampooing their hair (*erpangir*), it is always done in the river or made pool.

Data collecting used for the research was by preliminary study for the purpose of needs analysis, to see whether *persentabin* ritual was needed or not by the society around at Karo regency. Next step was, by absorbing the data gained from the informants and analyzed it by data selection, using Clifford Geertz & H. Richard Niebuhr Theory and Henry A. Virkler & Karelynn Gerber Ayayo.

## Results and Discussion

### Persentabin Ritual

*Persentabin* Ritual is held based on the society's perception against the incident of Sinabung eruption of which they believe that it was happened as a prove of souls (ancestor) anger towards the human bad treatment to the environment. GBKP team assuring that this idea was derived from old citizen initiation to conduct the ritual. The old citizen claimed that the souls (ancestor)angry because of the human bad acts, for instance by moving the holy stone Nini Karo from the river or lake, taking out mountain wealth such as sulfur, oil, and gas.

The ritual which is held at Gunung Sinabung is also termed as Sarilala. According to Geertz (2010) that culture analysis is not a kind of empiric science which aims to find a fundamental rule but it is an interpretative science which aims to search meaning, instead. Whereas Clifford Geertz states that religion is a system of culture, he further explains that human being lives in a complicated system, which is by anthropologist as various cultures. Hence, if we try to understand about culture it is identically means religion, there is no other options except finding a proper method, it is '*interpretation*', see *Ibid* (396).

### **Purpose of Persentabin Ritual**

The purpose of Persentabin ritual is to decrease the souls (ancestor) anger as Nini Karo who always keep the environment saved especially Sinabung mountain located at Karo Regency. The society around hopefully having Persentabin ritual to get excuse or forgiveness from them, and asking for Sinabung mountain for not being erupted more.

The aim to Carried out Ritual Persentabin

### **Terms of Condition for Having Persentabin Ritual**

The procession is almost similar done en every village, of which they are wearing traditional clothes in light red and black, and binding their heads by a white rope or clothe. Sibaso leads the ritual at a place that they believe that it is a holy place to conduct the ritual such as : natural shower named as tapin, source of water named ulu tapin, cemetery of village founders named as Simantek kuta. At the ritual they give offerings for them to pleasure them and to have forgiveness.

It was done by August 2010, where some of the society were having the ritual at Law Kawar lake exactly at the Sinabung mountain, Sibaso led the ceremonial, his name is Tambah Tarigan in 70 years old. At the ritual, the followers brought some offerings such as : betel leaves, cigarettes, flowers and other harvest, they prayed and offer them for the souls (ancestor) whist asking to save their environment especially for Sinabung mountain for not to erupt more from that event and forever.

### **Religious / Theologous Analysis on Persentabin Ritual**

The purpose of analyzing based on theologous is to find out the research question of how the Christian theologists on Persentabin ritual as a phenomenal event after eruption, which is conducted by the society around Sinabung mountain at Kuta Gugung village, Karo regency. The analysis was done on the basis of Clifford Geertz dan H. Richard Niebuhr theory.

#### **1. Persentabin Ritual as An Animism in the society**

The existence of Persentabin ritual in the society shows that the process of ritual is a symbol of animism. According to E.P. Ginting (2011) says that the practice of animism in the society figures out the circumstance of monotheism is still weak, it becomes an irony for the Christian in Karo. In this case, animism is a problematic theologist case that needs focus minding from GBKP.

The ritual that conducted around Sinabung mountain is also termed as *Sarilala*.

According to Greetz that cultural analysis such as persentabin ritual is dislikely took out of experimental analysis which aims to find a fundament, but it is such an interpretative analysis which aims to find meaning, instead. Clifford Geertz in Qalam (2001) further says that religion is a system of culture, human beings live in the complicated meaningful system, that is called cultures by anthropologist. Henceforth, if people talk about culture it must be also integrated with religion, and the only one direction method to tide is interpretation method, (*Ibid* 396). He also agrees with Gilbert Ryle about his idea which proclaims that if people describe about culture, it needs to use thick description method, it is not fair to only describing what is going on but much more deep about what the meaning is, by the people, ( *Ibid* 408).

The result of interview with the informants, Rasden Boang Manalu, head of Christian educational citizenship guidance Department said the same idea that description method and direction method, each is functional and meaningful. Both are useful to tide integratedly between cultures and religion.

## **2 . Persentabin Ritual as Believing on Ancestor Soul**

The society of Karonese believes that there is a spiritual person who can bridge between human and souls, named Guru Si Baso. It is heard that the ancestor souls as the village keeper are always visit the sacral places at Sinabung mountain. After the mountain eruption, the people around were panic of how to save the village, they rushedly eager about some myths regarding of traditional believe. One of them was by having ritual at Lau Kawar lake located at the egde of Sinabung mountain bottom. Moreover, they also had ritual at other villages around Karo regency.

In this case, according to Nia Risa S (2009) though Karonese believe in Jesus as Christian, but they also trust their ancestor souls as the environment keeper. They are and always are, in the village and even they know what tiny things come and go to and from the village. Nini Karo is wellknown as the keeper of the village but not quite similar with God. The karonese believe in trinity of God as the universe Creator, who know every thing, who can do every thing, the Savior of the world, Alpha and Omega, for them Nini Karo as the ancestor souls are assigned to keep the village saved.

It is not an empiric generalization to say that Sinabung mountain is Nini Karo' house where they always exist on, but it is not totally proper for some other people of Indonesia. According to Heppy Agustina Surbakti (2012) society of Karonese believe that Sinabung mountain is just like home for the ancestor souls as Nini Karo, even though they are spirit (can not seen), but they really are. The study she conducted was a qualitative method using primer data that she took directly from the informants from 4 different villages around Karo regency namely : Tiga Pancur village, Suka Meriah, Simacem, and Bekerah. Dikemukakan village. As the result, the data showed that it is believed that their ancestor souls are believed staying at Sinabung mountain to keep the village saved.

Based on E.P. Ginting that the anger of Nini Karo against the people of Karo by erupting Sinabung mountain made the citizen being panic, this reason was showing that even though they are Christian that believe in Jesus as God, but they also trust Guru Si Baso can save their village from Nini Karo's anger. It was done by giving some offerings such as : tiding out white cocks, cigarettes, flowers, and white cows leading by Guru Si Baso for Nini Karo. When their small offering (white cocks, cigarettes, flower) was not successfully received by Nini Karo, then they increased it more such as white cows, big bunch of flowers, and so forth, till they proved that eruption was minimalized by Nini Karo. If the eruption stop they interpreted it as Nini Karo's response on their ritual.

## **3. Persentabin Ritual as Ambiguity**

*He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth ; He toucheth the hills, and they smoke ( Psalm 104 : 32).* E.P. Gintings describing that the monotheism society participation at Persentabin Ritual showed that such an action was figuring out about their ambiguity on believing, they could not distinguish between the power of God and the power of ancestor souls. Such a limitation of knowledge makes them rather unclearly to compare between. In this case, churches, priests or pastors are needed lighten their point of view towards such a problem.

Out of Ginting's description above, it seems that Karonese Christian includes GBKP members do not totally understand the essential theology of earthquake (evil). It can be indicated from the animism acts towards Sinabung mountain eruption that needs much time for them to clarify.

## **4. Persentabin Ritual as An Ambiguity Bless**

Basically, those who believe in monotheism, they majorly do not understand about blesses, and this reason makes them to have persentabin ritual around Sinabung mountain. They perceive that fertiled plantation around Sinabung mountain is the bless from Nini Karo at the mountain itself for human being. This also initiate them to have Persentabin Ritual. By having the ritual they believe that Sinabung mountain can give other blesses for them to manage such as cultivating farms, and other blesses.

## **5. Persentabin Ritual as A Stimuli in Motivating Christian Faith**

According to Pdt Matius P. Barus, M.Th, as the leader of GBKP that conducting the ritual post eruption, though it seemed tendly as animism but the reason was worrying. They do believe in God, as a matter of fact

they also believe that Nini Karo as the ancestor souls can save the village because the eruption was also it was as the impact of their anger, so they believe that Nini Karo can save it. The main task of theologian/Pastor is how to hold and lead such a worried people and improve their faith to God. For this reason, Erick Johnson Barus, D.Th, as a Priest/Pastor at GBKP said that it is needed to be intensively service then in worship to make their faith growing more and more big. Church server can not badly respond Guru si Baso as the leader of Persentabin ritual.

#### **F. Purpose of Persentabin Ritual**

The ritual conducted aims to minimize the anger of Sinabung mountain keepers (ancestor souls) named Nini Karo. The society around believe that the eruption was happened because Nini Karo was angry to the people and tourists who treat the environment badly or carelessly. So that by conducting *persentabin* ritual, it is trusted that Nini Karo can decrease anger, as to keep the mountain for not erupting more.

This process is also familiarized for the all generations people at Karo, for them to know that it is such a traditional ritual that they can do massively to get one aim, it is saved environment. The informants generalize the same idea that this ceremonial is a compulsory especially for the adult society to do for the purpose of saving the environment for now on generation and for the future generation.

#### **Conclusions**

For each of the village, the ritual rundown is almost the same. First of all, the embers wear dark red traditional clothe with black strips, and binding head by a white clothed rope. The ceremony is leading by Si Baso as the leader of ritual which is always conducted at the sacred places such as ; shower named Tapin in Karonese, water source named ulu tapin, and at the cemetery of village founder named Simantek kuta, in the procession they give offerings for the ancestor souls so that they will not be angry more from now and forever.

It was held at the end of August 2019, the people having ritual nearby Lau Kawar (lake) exactly at the edge of mountain bottom, then Si Baso whose name is Tamba Tarigan (70 years old) led the ritual and the other members gave some offerings such as : cigarettes, flowers, betel leaves, and other harvest, and then they had prayers together and asking for goodness from the ancestors souls as the keeper of the village so that there is not any eruption happen more.

Persentabin ritual is a part of Karo culture besides many other cultures in Karo. Since it is a culture, the Government should keep them all as Karonese contribution for Indonesia.

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