

# ***Bissu* in Their Role as Maintenance and Preserving Classical Buginese Culture**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Before the Islamic religion entered the land of Bugis, Bissu had a central role in the Buginese Kingdom. There were no traditional ceremonies or rituals without the presence of Bissu as executors as well as leaders of traditional processes. But nowadays, the Bissu community is challenging to find because the numbers are getting smaller. This research was conducted to find out the Bissu role in the modern era as the preserver of classical Buginese culture. The type of research used in this study is the type of qualitative research that is descriptive. The data in this study took the form of the Bissu role. The informants in this study were Bissu in Pangkep district. The method used is the interview method and documentation. The results of this study indicate the origin of Bissu in Segeri Pangkep, and this study also shows first the role of Bissu as the leader of special ceremonies rituals relating to the ancestors. Second, in the Buginese community, especially Pangkep, Bissu is usually regarded as Sandro (shaman). Third, Bissu as a caretaker, nurse, and bearer of Arajang (a royal heritage). Fourth, the Bissu has traveled around Indonesia, introducing Buginese culture through Ma'giri Dance as a dance that can only be done by the Bissu.

**Keywords:** *Bissu, role, classical Bugis*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In Buginess culture, there are four types of gender and one para-gender. The types are male (oroane), female (makkunrai), women who look like men (calalai), men who look like women (calabai), and gender (Bissu). Most people often misunderstand this type of Bissu. They are considered identical as calabai [1]. Before Islam entered Bugis land, Bissu had such a central role in the Kingdom, There were no traditional ceremonial activities or royal rituals without the presence of Bissu as both the executor and leader of the adat procession. In the Bugis cultural structure, Bissu is considered as a person who is able to become a bridge of communication between gods and humans through traditional processions using the language To Rilangi. In this tradition, Bissu upholds the tradition and its role as custodian of classical Buginese cultural values. This group is described as a person who has supernatural powers. They have obligations of a Bissu as guardians, nurses, and carriers arajang (royal inheritance). They also have role as leaders by conducting special ritual

ceremonies relating to the ancestors, sanro (shaman), and as a teacher for people who will get married.

Bissu acts as the king's advisor. In pre-Islamic times, they could be said to be traditional leaders and priests of ancient Bugis religion. As the executor of the royal ritual, the bishop determines the good day to start something, such as going down to the fields or building houses and places of worship (Arajang's house). Even before leaving for war, the king would always consult with the Bissu [2]. In line with Pasanrangi et al. [3], the role of bissu before the entry of Islam in South Sulawesi was as an executor of royal rituals in the ancient Bugis community. Its position as a connector (communicator) between the community and the gods pronounced in the language of to riolo. Bissu plays an important role in every custom ceremony in the kingdom because they are the king's servants and also as servants in the community.

The Bissu is considered as advisors and guards of Arajang in the kingdom. Especially, the people of Segeri who consider Bissu who is good at shamanism,

which is usually called sanro or shaman. The Segeri people sometimes call Bissu as a teacher where they ask for help from a Bissu to seduce the gods in medicine by encouraging people who want to do medicine to make offerings to honor spirits from heaven and from the earth [4].

However, today, the Bissu community is very difficult to find because of the increasingly small numbers. In Pangkep Regency, there are only less than ten people. This should receive special attention because they have a vital role as the preserver and preserver of classical Bugis culture. The vital role of Bissu as a preserver and preserver of classical Bugis culture has not been thoroughly examined. Previous researchers have more specifically examined the activities of Bissu in an custom ritual or activity.

This study aims to determine the role of Bissu as a preserver of classical Bugis culture, which is still maintained today. This study have an important meaning to be used as input for the community, especially the younger generation, to find out more about the Banau perana. The results of this study will provide an understanding of the true meaning of a Bissu's life, which can then be disseminated.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Bissu**

Bissu comes from the Bugis word "mabessi," which means clean. They are called Bissu because they are not bloody, pure (not dirty), and do not menstruate. There are also those who say that the word bissu comes from the word Bikhsu or Buddhist Priest, as expressed by Pelras [5] in Buginese Mankind, as a form of influence of Sanskrit in Bugis language. This tradition of transvestites has existed for hundreds of years ago in the land of Bugis. In the ancient manuscript (lontaraq), Bugis, sureq galigo stated that the first bissu on earth was called lae lae. Sureq Galigo tells the story of lae lae descended from heaven (Manurung) to Luwu along with Raja Luwu, Batar Guru, Eldest son of the Great Maharaja from heaven. According to the myth in the Galigo Sureq the teacher's Batara descends and comes out from a bamboo. The alienation of the teacher Batara from boting langi (the world of tasa) was remedied by his meeting with We 'Nyelli' Timo from Bori 'liung (the underworld). The two met and lived for generations in Ale Kawa (middle world) [2].

The role of bissu at the beginning of the formation of the Buginess community was very strong. The existence of bissu in the history of the Buginese is considered to be a contemporary of the birth of the Bugis tribe itself. At the beginning of its civilization, the people of South Sulawesi were strongly influenced by myths in oral and written traditions. For example, the

myths about Simpuruksiang in Luwu, Sengingridi in Bone, Petta Sekkanyili in Soppeng, Princess Tamalate in Gowa have , To Manurung forms of the cultural patterns of the Bugis and Makassarese in South Sulawesi. In the Bugis cultural structure, the role of bissu is quite special because in daily life it is considered as the only operator of communication between humans and gods through their traditional rituals using the language of God/sky (Basa Torilangi), therefore bissu also acts as guardian of tradition said oral-literary Bugis Ancient sure'La Galigo. Bissu also plays a role in regulating all the implementation of traditional ceremonies, such as ceremonies for pregnancy, birth, marriage (indo'botting), death, vows, offerings, rejects reinforcements, etc. [3].

### **2.2. The role of Bissu in society**

In the Buginese cultural structure, the role of Bissu is classified as special. In daily life, The group are considered that the only operator of communication between humans and Gods through traditional rituals and using the language of God / sky (torilangi base). Bissu also acts as a guardian of oral speech traditions. Ancient Bugis literature sure 'La Galigo. If this 'sure' is about to be read, then before it is removed from its storage, people beat the drum with a certain rhythm and burn incense. ' Bissu also plays a role in regulating all the implementation of traditional ceremonies, such as mappalili, pregnancy, birth, marriage, (indo 'botting), death, vows release, offerings, rejecting reinforcements, etc. [3].

Each Bissu has the magical power to lure others, or in the Bugis, the treasury is known as cening rara. This is what the bissu wear when dressing the bride so that it looks elegant and charming. The existence of the Bissu is indeed very closely related to the existence of the kingdom in the past. The position of a king is not perfect without the presence of Bissu. Bissu acts as the king's advisor. In pre-Islamic times, they could be said to be traditional leaders and priests of ancient Bugis religion. As the executor of the royal ritual, the bishop determines the good day to start something, such as going down to the fields or building houses and places of worship (Arajang's house). Even before leaving for war, the king would always consult with the Bissu [2].

## **3. METHODS**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which is to describe the role of bissu as a preserver and preserver of classical Bugis culture. This research produces and processes data that is descriptive in nature, such as interview transcripts, field notes, pictures, photographs, video recordings, and so on. Qualitative characteristics used in this study are that researchers act

as the main instrument, flexible design, and focus on the final results.

The data was obtained through interviews with Bissu and community leaders. Bissu is a person who is considered to have a very important role as a preserver and preserver of classical Buginese culture. Community leaders are people who are considered to have knowledge related to Bissu.

The steps that will be carried out in this research are: (1) Developing Research Instruments. The researchers used observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation guidelines. (2) Observation, in this study, observations will be made related to the role of bissu in society. (3) Interview, in this study, researchers will conduct interviews with bissu and community leaders in Pangkep related to the role of Bissu. (4) Data Processing, in this study, data processing can be done during and after data collection. (5) Making a Research Report, after collecting and processing data, the researcher will make a research report. This research report contains the results of research on the role of bissu as a preserver and preserver of classical Buginese culture.

The data analysis process consists of four main steps, namely, data identification, data transcription, coding, data analysis, and concluding. (1) Identification of the data in this study is carried out by collecting data related to the role of Bissu as a preserver and preserver of classical Bugis culture. (2) Transcription in this study is a copy of the results of the interview test and the recording of activities. (3) Data encoding in this study, namely: data about the role of Bissu as a preserver and preserver of classical Buginese culture given a PB code. (4) Data analysis will be carried out after all data regarding the role of Bissu as the preserver and preserver of classical Buginese culture. (5) Interpretation and concluding are the final stages of this study. This conclusion withdrawal stage involves setting findings based on the results of data analysis.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***4.1. The Origins of Bissu in Pangkep***

The origin of Bissu can reach Pangkep starting from the kingdom in Bone District. At that time, the heirloom, commonly called Arajang (rice plow), mysteriously disappeared from its place. The object is essential for the kingdom because if the object is lost, then disaster will befall the kingdom. So the palace priest (Bissu) was sent to find the Arajang. After a long search, it was found that Arajang was located in Pangkep district, precisely in the district of Segeri. When the Arajang is brought back to Bone, the Segeri kingdom does not give permission to be taken home to Bone. After considerable debate and discussion between

the two kingdoms, it was decided for Arajang to remain in the district of Segeri. Starting from that until now, Bissu settled in Pangkep as a caretaker and nurse of the heirloom.

Many people assume that Bissu is a Calabai (transvestite), but in essence, not all Calabai can be referred to as Bissu. Becoming a Bissu is a calling of the soul because to become a Bissu before the Ippareba ritual (laid down), where someone who will become Bissu will be eliminated worldly. But to go through that process is not easy, because one has to face life and death. Namely, someone will be put to sleep in a state wrapped in a shroud and prefer hunger for three days to complete the requirement of ceremony.

According to a statement from Puang Matoa Nani, the number of Bissu in Pangkep is around ten people. Generally, the Bissu in daily life usually wears white clothes, especially when going to carry out rituals. During the Kingdom of Bissu became a very important. Bissu was considered a holy person and was considered capable of dealing with the ancestors so that almost every royal activity involved Bissu. Therefore, during the kingdom, all of Bissu's needs were borne by the kingdom. In contrast to the present day, in daily life, the Bissu carry out activities such as raising livestock and gardening, but besides that, there are some Bissu who work as brides to support their lives. Each Bissu has the magical power to lure others, or in the Bugis, the treasury is known as *cenning rara*. This is what the bissu wear when dressing the bride so that it looks elegant and charming.

### ***4.2. The Role of Bissu in the Modern Era as A Preserver and Preserver of Classical Bugis Culture***

Bissu has a very vital role in the community because many activities are bound by the customs of the Bugis community that cannot be carried out without the presence of Bissu. Currently, Bissu is still in charge as the leader of a special ritual ceremony related to the ancestors. Such as *Massongka bala* activities (reject the disaster), *Mappesabbi*, *Mappalili* (rituals before going down), *Mattauriolo* (remembering ancestors), activities for praying before welcoming the big days, and many more. Because of the Bugis community, Bissu is believed to have the ability to interact with the Gods (God). In carrying out the rituals, the Bissu have their own language, which is called the language of the gods, which is only understood by the Bissu.

In *Mappalili's* activities, for example, as a guardian of Arajang, the ritual must be led by a Bissu. Before the farmers started planting rice, a *Mappalili* ritual was held with the aim that the harvests were abundant and protected from disasters that could interfere with the harvest. In the ritual, Arajang will be carried by Bissu,

who will previously behold a ritual of reciting mantras to invoke blessings from the creator.

In the Bugis community, especially in Pangkep, Bissu is usually considered a Sandro (shaman). Many people who still uphold their custom still entrust Bissu as someone who is considered capable of treating diseases because of their knowledge and ability to interact with the Gods. With the condition that people who want to do medicine must make offerings to respect ancestral spirits.

Bissu as caretaker, nurse, and carrier of Arajang (royal inheritance). As a guardian of royal objects, not only Arajang is cared for. At Bissu Nisa home, there is heirlooms that is more than a piece of cloth. It containing live story display of the Bugis and written using letters Lontara sourced from the book *La Galigo*. The Bissu rewrite the *La Galigo* to a piece of cloth. They hope that their successors could read even a small portion of the contents of the book where the Bissu only understands the ancient Bugis language contained in the book.

Not only that, Bissu as a preserver of the Buginese culture. The Bissu has traveled around Indonesia, introducing the Bugis culture through the Ma'giri dance as a dance that can only be performed by the Bissu. In cultural activities carried out by the Bissu government, they are usually called to appear in these activities. Although the situation and conditions faced by the Bissu have been different from the past, the Bissu still hold fast and maintain the customs and culture of classical Bugis, which is almost extinct at this time.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Bissu comes from the Bugis language "mabessi," which means clean. Bissu is considered as someone who is considered capable of communicating with the Gods (deities) through special rituals using language to rilangi, which is only understood by the Bissu. The results of this study indicate the origin of the Bissu in Segeri originating from Arajang (rice plow), which mysteriously disappeared from its place in the kingdom of Bone. The object is very important for the kingdom, because if the object is lost, then disaster will befall the kingdom. Then the pastor went to the palace (Bissu) to find Arajang that was later found to be in the district. Pangkep precisely in Segeri District. Until now, Bissu settled in Pangkep as a preserver of the heirloom because previously, the royal Segeri did not allow the arajang to be brought back to the Kingdom of Bone. The results also show that Bissu has a very vital role in society. A lot of activities that are bound customs Bugis society cannot be conducted without the presence of Bissu. Currently, Bissu is still in charge as the leader of a special ritual ceremony related to the ancestors. Such as Massongka bala activities (reject disaster),

Mappesabbi, Mappalili (rituals before going down), Mattauriolo (remembering ancestors), activities for praying before welcoming the big days, and many more. In the Bugis community, especially in Pangkep, Bissu is usually considered a Sandro (shaman). Bissu as guardian, nurse, and carrier of Arajang (royal inheritance). Not only that, as a preserver of Bugis culture, the Bissu have traveled around Indonesia, introducing the Bugis culture through the Ma'giri dance as a dance that can only be performed by the Bissu.

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