

Indians Hybrid Communities in Aceh: Between Identity and Assimilation

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ABSTRACT

Aceh is one of the areas settled by various nations and tribes derived from different places, areas, and even continents. Its location has a strategic position and attracted many nations to stop over and settle at this place. It cannot be denied that this area became home to ethnic diversity of different tribes. There are, at least, seven different ethnic groups predominated today in Aceh, including the Acehnese considered as the largest ethnic group compared to the others. One of their predecessors is Indians. There is a red thread between historical evidence and their daily performance as a community, even though they already assimilated with the local culture and tradition and have a new mix culture. An example that is clearly to be seen nowadays in villages is a tradition of having long hair for women and make a bund. They maintain this tradition as a valuable cultural legacy. Based on the historical and anthropological approaches, this paper shows how the Indians collaborate, acculturate, and assimilate with the local people. The result of this research shows a model of Indians as a group not only maintaining their identity but also blending with Acehnese as local culture which is quite different from other parts in the archipelago, such as Arab community in Palembang and Chinese in Aceh and in some parts of Indonesia. This research also becomes a choice for solving the problem arisen in relation to create peace and harmony by understanding the background of Acehnese culture and behaviour since the Acehnese is the pluralist nation. Harmony will come up when we are able to understand other character and tradition.

Keywords: *Indians, Acehnese, identity, assimilation, attitude.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Aceh is in a strategic position, much frequented by foreigners. It is located at the northern tip of Sumatra, surrounded by not only wide seas, but also neighbouring various other countries. To the north and the east are the waters of the Strait of Malacca, to the south is the province of North Sumatra, while to the west is the wide Indian Ocean. Aceh covers 56.770.81 km² (Acehprov, 2016).

Its strategic location has attracted many nations to call by and stop over at this place. Since long ago, certain tribes have seriously tried to settle in this region. Amongst these many visiting peoples, it is the Arabs, Indians, Chinese, and Europeans who most stand out. When Indians first came to the river in the village of Pande, they called it '*aca*' meaning 'beautiful place'. It was only later that this Indian word was changed into 'Aceh'. (Ishak, 2011; Sufi, 2016; Hidayah, 2015: 3). There are many other myths about the origin of the

place name 'Aceh'. The Arabs used to call *Aceh* by the Arabic name of '*Asyi*', while the Dutch called it '*Atchin*'. Yule and Burneell, two English explorers, saw a resemblance between '*Acheen*' and the Tamil word *Attai*. (Zainuddin, 1961: 23-26; Hidayah, 2015: 3-9).

This area became home to an ethnic diversity of different tribes. Acehnese people may be considered ethnically diverse. So that, the people of Aceh are a pluralist nation - some diffused and assimilated, even appearing to be spawning an entirely new hybrid culture, while others remain acculturated, steeped in the indigenous cultures from which they arose.

Seven different ethnic groups would seem to predominate today: the Acehnese, the Aneuk Jame, the Gayo, the Alas, the Tamiang, the Simeulue, and the Kluet. The Acehnese are the largest in number and occupy more land area than do the others, i.e., Aceh Besar, Pidie, Aceh Jeumpa, Banda Aceh, Sabang, the whole of the North and the West of Aceh, a part of the

East, and most of the South. (Sufi, 2016; Hidayah, 2015: 3-9). The peoples of these parts are indeed the hybrids of various tribes: the Aneuk Jamee tribe, for example, is a hybrid of the Acehnese with the Minang tribe of West Sumatra. The Gayo people are mixed with the Batak and the Tamiang tribe are mixed with Malay people. However, their numbers are smaller compared to the Acehnese.

The Acehnese are mixed with the descendants of all of those pioneer settlers who put down roots here long time ago: the Indians, the Arabs, the Chinese, and the Europeans. The Indians integrated with the Acehnese in a much softer and more considerate way. They interacted with the Acehnese more openly and more tolerantly. They were thus better able to coexist and engage in the normal give and take of different cultures and traditions living alongside one another. Arabs had first set foot in that northwest corner of Sumatra, in search of spices, as early as the 11th century. It was the Arabs who were responsible for introducing the Islamic religion into several of the kingdoms of the Samudera Pasai Empire in the 13th century. (Reid, 2007: 1). Furthermore, the arrival of the Chinese in Aceh happened thanks to the remarkable voyaging of Admiral Cheng-Ho who came to Aceh with his men in 1415. (Tan Tan Sen, 2010). Much later, in 1875, the Dutch initiated a massive new intake of Chinese manpower to overcome a labour shortage. In fact, these nineteenth century Chinese newcomers did not mix all that well with the Acehnese for two main reasons. *First*, their religion was different. *Second*, their way of adhering was rather strongly to their own Chinese identity.¹ (Usman, 2009: 1-10). Similarly, those of European provenance were assimilated only with difficulty on account of their remarkably different religion and their rude social dominance as the colonizing people. Both parties, colonized and colonizer were greatly affected by the division of society into pronounced social strata. Social relationships were made only with difficulty. It is thus most instructive to further study on their self-identity as well as their successful integration with the locals all the way from that distant time right down to the present day.

The Indians were one group whose arrival in Sumatra pre-dated the coming of the Arab traders. The arrival of the Indians of course connects to the advent and the spread of the Hindu religion. The estimated date of these events pre-dates the Christian era; it all happened BC. Physical artefacts of Hinduism, like pieces of temples and tombstones are still to be found in Aceh. (Zainuddin, 1961: 18-19). Therefore, we can

¹ The way of Chinese people maintaining their identity and the difficulty of assimilation with local people can be read further in *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*, written by Mely G. Tan, published in 2008. Therefore, only few of them mixed with the local tradition.

assume that the Hindu religion developed from out of the native local religions and that both of these traditions intercommunicated with the Islam that the Arab traders brought along with them. Moreover, it should be remembered that these Arabs, before they began their trading in Sumatra, had, at an earlier time, first traversed Gujarat. It was together with Gujarat traders that the Arabs first came to the archipelago and their first port of call was Aceh. It was from here that the Islamic religion first spread into the archipelago.

The character and culture of Indians has certainly affected the Acehnese way of life and the life models that they follow. Therefore, the identity, assimilation, and acculturation of Indian attitude and behaviours is an important part of understanding Acehnese culture as a whole and it has become important to understand to what extent concerns for the ancestral heritage of Indian affect Acehnese outlooks and behaviour today.

This paper seeks to trace the origins and development of Indian as a group within the Acehnese community; to examine their perception of assimilation and their perception of national identity; to investigate interactions between this group and the local people, their status with other ethnic groups; and to try and situate Indian people within the wider context of Aceh province, Indonesia, and the larger world of Southeast Asia.

This study is a preliminary one focussed on particular families of Indian people. This should spur on the next research, which will be to find detailed and thorough information which specifies the kind of assimilation that each group must undertake to integrate itself into the wider Acehnese community. This study will therefore focus specific families, whose members live in Aceh Besar and Pidie region, although other members of the same family may still be found in various other regions.

This study adopts an anthropological and historical approach to the collection and analysis of data. There are two steps to conducting this research: direct observation and in-depth interview. Observations carried out examine how some situations pertain in the localized portions as opposed to the hybridized portions of Acehnese society where assimilation of Indian culture has taken place at some time in the past. Where observation reveals inadequate data then in depth interview is resorted to questions posed which are not too rigid and not too intrusive and yet which reveal in some clarity how the assimilation of Indian culture has proceeded over time.

This research is conducted with intent to reveal the existence of and the extent of the melding of Indian culture with the local culture as well as the participation and involvement of these communities in the local environment and organs of State. This research is

expected to contribute to the government's own policy of assessing the cultural input of Indian culture in the wider Acehnese community. Stakeholders should be able, as a consequence of this research, to act appropriately in solving problems and maintaining peace in the region. It is generally known that Aceh has fluctuated between conflict and peace, even as several natural disasters have visited themselves on this region. That which can contain and unify the Acehnese people becomes an important factor that should be determined and explored appropriately as a way for maintaining a peaceful atmosphere in this region.

There are some studies relating to ethnicity in general in the archipelago. This work can be enumerated as follows. Usman Abdul Rani, who researched the Chinese ethnicity '*Etnis Cina di Perantauan Aceh*' published by 'Yayasan Obor Indonesia'. His research covers much about the provenance and the existence of the Chinese ethnicity in Aceh and their interaction with the local people. (Usman, 2009). The study of Retno Purwati has focused on the Arab community in Palembang: '*Komunitas Arab di Palembang*' published by 'the Proceedings of Scientific Meeting' of IPLBI 2016. (Purwati, 2016). She highlights an Arab village located in Seberang Ulu, where cemeteries, ancient mosques, and ancient buildings of Arabic style have existed and been maintained right down to the present day. This community began its existence in the 19th century. The rectangular house is identified as typically Arabic architecture. It lasted until the 1980s. Nowadays, land is too scarce for building in this style. Jonge in his '*Minoritas Terbelah: Orang Arab Batavia*' published by 'Esai Sosio-Kultural' asserts that Arabs were present in Batavia (now it is known as Jakarta) from the very outset. The community maintained its identity even though some unity was inevitably lost as parts of the community got absorbed by the larger Betawi community, adopting Betawi culture and tradition (Jonge, 2007). There is also a study of Indian influence in Sumatra performed by Bambang Budi Utomo in 2016. He explains how, from an archaeological point of view, India has left its mark throughout Sumatra, especially through its influence on the kingdom of Srivijaya. Indian style statues may be found in all places in Sumatra, including Aceh. (Utomo, 2016). Those researches and studies launch that in terms of focussing on Indian contribution to Aceh is still unavailable, yet. This study, in fact, tries to fill this gap.

This study focusses on how intercultural communication takes place and how identity is both subjective and yet a vital ingredient of social solidarity. (315-318 Gilray, 1999). Identity will still sustain itself as society faces crisis and social change. Individuals regarded as political figures will follow the existing social movements. (Woodward, 1999: 21-27). Identity then slowly melts away, disappears as the process of assimilation with other ethnicities progresses until

finally, they merge into one another. Some experts such as Bruner (1956), Graves (1967), and Grebler (1970) agree that an ethnic identity can be positively correlated with acculturation and assimilation together over a long period of time. The crisis of assimilation will disappear as will the uniqueness of the ethnicity. (Mulyana, 2014: 158).

When assimilation occurs, two things happen. *First*, the minorities will lose their specific character and merge with the majority group. *Second*, minorities and majority will meld with each other to form a completely new entity.²

In addition to changes of identity, the theory of cultural diffusion will be addressed. Diffusion theory was developed by Fritz Prabener and Wilhelm Schmidt. It asserts that human beings prefer to borrow from other cultures, and that these cultures then spread either as a group or else from one person to another. G. Elliot Smith, William J. Berry, and W. H. R. Rivers claim that Egyptian civilization has spread worldwide due to its contacts with people outside Egypt. (Ember, 2015: 73-75). According to Sihabudin, the process of social interaction between two or more ethnics influences a cultural diffusion, and the concrete form of interaction is communication. (Sihabudin, 2013: 55). In this way, this study looks at the intercultural communication, which served to see Indian culture diffuse and spread itself in Aceh. (Mulyana, 2012: 91-106; Kim, 2014: 152-161).

2. HISTORICAL EVIDENCES

History shows that Indians settled in Aceh in a long time ago. Research proves the matter and evidence of Indian heritage is apparent today not only in Hindu cultural legacy but in the Islamic heritage as well. The Indrapuri temple ruins that is presently converted to be mosque, preserved and conserved by the local government are a case in point.



Figure 1 The Indrapuri temple ruins that is already converted to be mosque. Photograph by Fakhriati. It is taken from the left side of mosque.

² This point of view is stated by Jiobu in his books entitled *Ethnicity & Assimilation* published in 1988. (See Mulyana: 2014:160).

There also exists a fragment of an Awalokiteswara head found in Aceh whose hair resembles a crown of great height. This statue is now in the National Museum in Jakarta with code Inv. No. 248. It is thought that this statue resembles a similar statue found in Thailand dating from the ninth or tenth century. (Budi Utomo, 2016: 193-194).

Islamic relics that relate to the Indian ethnicity have been researched by Feener. He conducted his work on Muslim grave markers carved in a distinctive obelisk-like form known as gate *plang-pleng* in Lamri and Cot Meuligoue (a palace - a name that might be derived from the Tamil word *Malikai*) at an early Islamic site in Perlak. (Feener, 2011: 1-3). There is also the tomb of the queen during the Sultan Malikus Sholeh located in the village of Meunjee, Pasai. The gravestone bears letters in Sanskrit, in Jawi, and in Arabic. The date 781 Hijra appears on the headstone. (Zainuddin, 1961: 57-59).

In the Lamroh region, Cet Keueung, Aceh Besar, is also found a well – the well head consists of six overlapping squares with, in the center, the circular well is 150 cm. Within 100 meters of this well are carved grave markers. See two figures below:



Figure 2 A well found in the Lamroh region, Cot Keueung Aceh Besar.
Photograph by Fakhriati



Figure 3 Carved grave markers found in the Lamroh region, Cot Keueung Aceh Besar.
Photograph by Fakhriati

According to the local people, this well and statue belong to an Indian cultural legacy. By taking into

account to the location of well and distinctive grave marker which is not so far from the well and its footing just a little bit higher than the well, a tentative conclusion can be drawn that an Islamic empire was established around this region which was peopled most likely by the Indian community. One need only survey the faces of the modern-day people around this place – indeed they look like Indian faces.



Figure 4 Local people³ in Lamroh, Cot Keeung, Aceh Besar.
Photograph taken by Fakhriati near by the well and carved grave markers areas.

In addition, today's residents no longer recognize their ancestors. The Indian forebears have been wholly absorbed into the local culture. Language and Indigenous Acehnese culture has taken over their lives.

Besides attention paid to heritage sites, the Indians have now become engaged in religious broadcasting – they have indeed produced some expert religious leaders who preach the Word. Nuruddin Ar-Raniry, a great figure in Sufism was one such preacher who migrated to the province from elsewhere. Here is an example of an Indian scholar who paid great attention to Aceh. With his great knowledge and ability, he wrote many books on Sufism. One of his books discussed on science and sufis in Aceh, and even his scientifically disagreement with other ulamas is *Akhbarul Akhirah*. In this book, he described what he meant with *wahdatul wujud* and his understanding on *Nur Muhammad*. Besides, he reviewed the relationship between al-Gazali's impression and Arabic teaching of Sufism in Southeast Asia. (Hiroko, 2016: 75-89).

³ This Lamroh women went to the well to show us the relics condition in this area.

In the Islamic period, the relationship between Indian, Arab, and Nusantara *ulamas* was very close. It is approved by many treatises and books used widely in the archipelago. One of the Indian books is *Tuhfat al-Mursalah* written by al-Burhanpuri, a prominent Indian scholar. In the meantime, Kurani, an Arabic scholar took part elaborating that book by writing another book entitled *Ithaf al-Zaki bi Sharh at-Tuhfah al-Mursalah* in order to help the Nusantara communities, particularly those in Aceh, to better understand Burhanpuri's book. Kurani's work performed is also for answering the ongoing debate of understanding sufism in Acehnese community and Nusantara in general.⁴ Hamzah Fansuri and Ar-Raniry are the prominent sufi figures who launched this debate on how to understand the true teachings of Sufism.

In general, the Indians who stopped and settled in Aceh are called India Kling⁵, those are derived from the Tamil. One of the purposes of their coming to Aceh was for trade because this area has rich natural production. (Hurgronje, Volume 1, 1996: 17; Perret, 2011: 25; Reid, 2020). The Indians who came to Aceh had a character that could be accepted by the people who were already there. They did not come up with violence, but with gentleness and friendly behaviour to the local people. Thus, on one side, they are able to captivate the locals. On the other side, local people have the advantages from the newly arrived, those who had expert knowledge on medicine, religion, carpentry, art, and literature (Fang, 2013: 49-50). Thus, the Indians were well accepted, able to survive, and remain in this region until today.

3. BETWEEN IDENTITY AND ASSIMILATION

Indian group on which this study is focussed has its own different identity. Indians came to Aceh in a peaceful manner and influencing the native culture by "penetration pacifique" (breakthrough in a peaceful way). (Koentjaraningrat, 2011: 152) Their original cultures have been diffused in numerous distant locations such as Aceh. By establishing good relations with local tribes over a long period of time, their different identities tended to fuse into an entirely new identity. The process of assimilation had been crucial in the manipulation of their new identity. Identity can move along and positively correlate with assimilation. This fact has fully in line with the view of Mulyana on

⁴ About al-Kurani's work of *Ithaf al-Zaki*, (see Fathurahman, 2012).

⁵ For the Acehnese, Kling tribe is identic with trader. This appellation is apart from its history that Indians came to Aceh as traders. (Hurgronje, 1996:17). Tamil has started to work as trader in this area, especially Banda Aceh since 11th century. (Budi Utomo, 2016: 219).

the topic of identity and assimilation. (Mulyana, 2014: 158).

Historically, the Indian people demonstrated their distinctive culture to various host ethnicities wherever they stopped over to stay. History attests to their success at harmonious integration by means of the polite approach which characterizes their interactions with other people.

In its struggle against the Dutch colonialists, Aceh holds the trophy for the longest and most sustained confrontation - Indian along with other Acehnese joined forces and set up fighting groups against the Dutch colonialists, who were branded as 'infidels'. Descendants of the Indians worked together to stand up to, to confront the Netherlander invader - they were united in their aim of eventually eliminating the invader from Acehnese soil. (Reid, 2007: 168-200; Ashraf, 2014).

Assimilation took root and grew the seed of Acehnese identity as a distinct group in Aceh. The process of assimilation was accomplished easily since they lived in mixed families in an atmosphere of diversity. They lived together in diversity.

Almost of the whole identity of the culture of these two ethnic groups was merged into part of the culture. The concept of manipulated identity as revealed by Mulyana becomes relevant to this study, although the typical face - regarded as a physical identity - are still able to identify even though unexplainable or have already become blurred for the owner of this identity. In the village of Sampang Luengputu, physical appearance as Indian hybrid is clearly seen. Their facial appearance is very similar that of the Indians. Likewise, the clothes they wear and unconsciously look happy in have the style and color from their own family heritage and culture.



Figure 5 Indian hybrids in Gampong Sawang, Leungputu, Pidie.
Photograph by Fakhriati

Nonetheless, the Indian hybrid - in the course of an in-depth interview - gives answers that do not indicate any combative defence of their Indian identity. Indeed they seem to have forgotten and know nothing about the

background of their ancestors, even though they live side by side with people of different skin colour and facial appearance.⁶

When reminded that their distinctively coloured clothing was Indian in style,⁷ they simply responded with "we only feel really happy wearing these clothes". They could not explain further. Their individual identities have merged and assimilated with local culture.

One interesting thing to study further might be what was revealed by one of the informants we visited, Teungku Hajj Yusuf, whose brothers had similarly Indian faces living in different areas with him, that are in Luengputu, Sabang, and Meureudeu. Teungku stated: "We have the same face. Therefore, we came from India". It shows that the ethnic Indian hybrids are scattered everywhere in the region of Aceh. They mingle with the brothers of the different tribes around them.⁸

To sum up, Indians have a lot fused with other ethnic groups in Aceh, and turn themselves into ethnic Aceh. They speak fully and use Acehnese language completely without any slightest jolt. They no longer count their ancestors' language as their native language. As for the rest of South East Asia, Indian ethnics are easy to be found all over Malaysia and Singapore.

4. THE APPEARANCE OF INDIAN IDENTITY IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

People of Indian background fall into four main categories: biogenetic, cultural background, language, and clothing and food. This is the profile that presents itself as differing from the background and traditions of the native culture. Assimilation and diffusion work together over the passage of time. This is the view that has, over time, generally become accepted. There has been cross-cultural communication and intense interaction between the relevant communities. The result of this cultural interaction has been the formation of a new culture that is just Acehnese. Thus, the process of integration has continued in its successful path. Some elements of one culture have had to be adapted to suit the conditions of the larger culture that is forming itself from out of this interaction. It is a process of assimilation of Indian culture that has formed the Acehnese culture that we know today. (Koentjaraningrat, 2011: 160). The process of assimilation has proceeded apace, that cannot be denied.

⁶ Direct observation performed in December 2016.

⁷ For the detail influenced and mixed textiles between India and Archipelago, including Aceh. (See Hema, 2016).

⁸ Direct observation performed in January 2017.

Its driving factor has been the necessity of breaking down barriers. According to Koentjaraningrat, it is simply the fact of two peoples being able to get on with each other that brings assimilation to a successful conclusion. (Koentjaraningrat, 2011: 160). The factor of toleration and empathy between three differing cultures has been the driving force of assimilation. Apart from that, mutual respect and value, openness to change on the part of both parties seems to have laid down a very successful partnership.

There seems to be no prohibiting factors to disturb the practical course of communication between Indian and local population. Indians does not feel themselves strangers amongst people. They are bound to neighbour with anyway. Although they have a distinctive physiognomy, those hybrids once in place, seem to minimize any contrast they have and are able to be accepted as just a new type of culture. Indians simply came as minorities, and did not in any way threaten the social leaders in charge of Aceh. On the contrary they were warmly welcomed.

A willingness to live in peace together became a significant way for the Indians and Arabs to live and work in Aceh. Unity against warfare became a main means of integration into the body of Aceh. Unconsciously, this assimilation process was internalized, forming itself into a new culture. This characteristic behaviour was noticeably the same as the behaviour of Indians in other locations, such as in Penang, Malaysia. There was an ulama grave of Keramat Tuah called by the local people in Penang. This is a well-known site of Malabari died in 1715. (Sumit K. Mandal, 2012: 359)

In biogenetic side, Indians show their outer appearance similar to their predecessors. They serve as a model that slightly different from others' appearance. Dark skin colour, and straight and tall body posture are the hallmarks of Indian extraction. The delicate eyebrows are quite long as well, although their physical appearance has been diluted by mixture with other tribes. Of course, this is particularly true of those families who have been most steadfast to their lineage. There is much more to be seen than just bodily appearance.

Cultural origin can be seen in art, crafts, clothes, architecture and traditions. Although their culture seems so deeply merged with the general, it can still differ from the typical in Aceh. Indeed, they have internalized so much of the local culture because of three factors. *First* is marriage with local people without specializing their ethnics. *Second*, there is their positive attitude to the surrounding environment traditional to their nature. *Third* is their great sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, a regional sense of ownership that is shared locally but strictly protected from outside interference. Colour of apparel may be particular to a

locality but, in all parts of Aceh, Indian decoration richly prevail. Red, yellow, and black predominate, but anyway, as marriage partners traverse the aisle, there must be rich decoration on either side. Apart from this, rich decoration is to be found in ancient manuscripts, also featuring the theme of red and black. Where yellow is used, it is used carefully and maintains a golden hue. The decoration is a flower-shaped vine that even so avoids a too life-like resemblance; such decoration may include inanimate stars but not the human being. In manuscripts, vines are often to be found.



Figure 6 Pidie Manuscript of *Sarakata*⁹
Photograph by Fakhriati

Amongst the cultural performances to be viewed in Aceh is the still existing but ancient rite of ‘*rapa’i daboh*’. This rite of ‘*Rapa’i*’ – or organized social mingling – is still found in Aceh today seen in its original form. This rite of *Rapa’i* began with some Indian scholar, perhaps Ar-Raniry who hold *Rifa’iyah* sufi order. The term ‘*Rapa’i*’ comes from the word *Rifa’iyah* sufi order, which means ‘congregation’ but later modified to ‘*Rapa’i*’ (Schroter, 2009:175).

In daily life, tradition adopted from Hinduism is still to be seen, particularly in villages, which is still uncontaminated by the global phenomenon of mass communication. Women with long hair to make a bun are a Hindu survival brought to the people of Aceh from India. (Aceh: *Sanggoy*). (Hurgronje, Volume 1, 1996: 16). This tradition in line with Islamic principle in that length of hair clearly distinguishes man from woman. This is an example of how Islam may sometimes adopt an ancient tradition in order to better preserve Islamic principles.

⁹ *Sarakata* is one of government letters during the Acehnese kingdom. This letter was usually written for appointment of government employee.

In terms of language, the Indian ethnicity seems to preserve its ancestral languages as a local patois. Nevertheless, the processes of acculturation and assimilation have so far advanced that most traces of original Gujarati and Arabic have been lost. Their language has already merged into the language of Aceh, adopted by Acehnese people in general. When interviewed, they could claim no better knowledge of their ancestral tongue because they were fluent in the modern modified local language of Aceh. Some of them have yet to master Bahasa Indonesia, the modern lingua franca. One example of a modern word borrowing from Indian language is ‘*santri*’ - disciples of Islamic traditional school - derived from ‘*sastri*’ means those who know holy books. (Haningsih, 2008:30). As for the types of spices used in Acehnese food, it is generally considered to be of Indian origin, and this is popular with Acehnese folk. There are also many other types of curry that no doubt originated from India.

It can be concluded that the major elements supporting the merger of Indian culture with the general population were the concepts of peaceful coexistence and non-disruption of the local culture. Assimilation came about as a blend of two or three cultures that gave birth to another culture altogether, a culture cemented by intra-communal tolerance and respect for the culture as partner. This has been the experience of Indian from the time they first arrived in Aceh right down to the present day.

As a result, the merging of cultures has produced some habits that grew unconsciously and others that are thought of as being ‘uniquely Acehnese’. This is all in line with the view of the commentator, Schroter, who observed that homogeneity arises from heterogeneity. Schroter clearly states that the Acehnese homogeneity arises from the wide mixture of trading nations whose trading activities were centered on Aceh. They also indeed suffered when they had to work together to fight off Dutch colonization. (Schroter, 2009: 169).

5. CLOSING REMARKS

In conclusion, it can be said that the Acehnese are a combination of many tribes, but that the leading tribes of influence were the Indian settlers. As these settlers came to Aceh, the native tribes were already hybridized, enlarging their sphere of interest and spreading themselves out, putting down roots as, themselves, a new culture. Indian settlers were able to spread and assimilate their culture with that of Aceh natives, in a way that was well received.

This study finds a successful blend of Indian culture with the native culture of Aceh. Lastly, these two settler cultures helped to form a completely new culture of Aceh. This was successful as a result of their mingle, and let’s be friendly attitudes of the newcomers, who were completely open to the culture they found in that

place. The same group that assimilated so well, learned also how to protect and to fight against outside disturbance. This profile differs quite a lot from that of the Chinese, even though they have lived for a considerable time alongside the Acehnese. Openness and toleration between the Acehnese and the Chinese never reached such a degree of successful integration.

This study is just a preliminary one in the realm of inter-ethnic relations. As a follow-up of this study, there should be a closer examination of the cross cultures: India-Aceh, and of the different personalities of each one of these partners, so that we can learn more about the personality differences of each of the ethnic groups targeted in the research. Thus, the details of their different cultures can be considered.

There is a red thread between identity they have from their predecessors and their performance and behaviour. One of the identities they pertain and followed by other Acehnese is having long hair of women and make a bun. This already become the Acehnese tradition adopted by the Acehnese women who are not contaminated by global phenomenon yet. Another one is the character of having strong protection to their group. The Indians is a tribe with their own style of nationalism that is remarkable enough. In addition, they have a remarkable and independent sense of in-group care and of group protection. It can therefore be said that the true-bloodied Acehnese are certainly great characters – and people of great personality. The nature of the nation of Aceh is an important matter for decision and policy-makers.

Moreover, the Indonesian nation cannot be thought of without Aceh. It is as a part of the greater Indonesian nation that Aceh binds in well with Southeast Asia as a whole. Therefore, to know and to understand the character and culture of Indians, who have occupied parts of Aceh for so long, is important and useful for policy makers and decision makers in order to get a true picture of the region. The State of Indonesia has to be aware of the considerable ethnic and cultural variations that enrich the Acehnese character and which enable it to blend in with other ethnic groups.

The role of local government functionaries in Aceh and indeed the role of the government itself must be to form policies that take into account the character and the culture of the Acehnese. Party policy makers for political purposes may be exposing themselves to a wider look at and consideration of the active roles that ethnic groups in Aceh play. There should be no narrowing of understanding. As Simanjuntak states in his study of the positions facing Gayo, an ethnics living in the middle of Aceh (Aceh Tengah) (Simanjuntak, 2016: 131), “It is to be hoped that the creation of peace can be realized by the implementation of a culture of peace through an understanding of each other’s ethnic characters”.

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