



Animal Mythology in Lampung Folklore

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ABSTRACT

Myth as a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin, is related to religion and practice and is believed to be something that exists. As part of world culture, Lampung has a lot of folklore. Lampung folklore contains values that reflect the richness of the soul, philosophy, character, and civilizational environment formed and nurtured in tradition. Many of the folk tales that developed in Lampung raised the origin of a place, the basis of a society, the source of creatures in the universe, and mythological creatures. However, not many studies raise the mythical animal phenomenon found in Lampung folklore. Therefore, this study provides an overview of mythical animals in Lampung oral literature and the function of these myths. This study used a descriptive analysis method with a myth-critical approach to reveal and describe the embodiment of animal mythology in Lampung's oral literature. The data used were taken from field research in four districts in Lampung Province: West Lampung Regency, Central Lampung Regency, West Tulangbawang Regency, and Waykanan Regency. The results of the study concluded that the mythical animals that appeared in the oral literature of the people in the four districts were crocodiles, dragons, caterpillars, and Garuda birds (eagles). The myth is interpreted as the relationship between humans, animals, and plants as a symbol of the responsibility of living creatures to coexist and adapt to each other.

Keywords: *Animals, Lampung, Myths, Oral literature.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past, myths were created to instill values that were then interpreted by humans into their cultural value systems. Often the same type of story can be found in myths from different parts of the world.

According to Abrams (1999), the term "myth" comes from a classical Greek that has meaning as signifying any story or plot, even though it cannot be ascertained the truth. But in general, he defines myth as one story in mythology, which is a system of ancient hereditary stories that were once believed to be true by certain cultural groups, and which serves to explain (in this case the intentions or actions of gods and supernatural beings) about what happens in the world as it is. The story is to give reasons for social customs and observances and to impose sanctions on the rules by which people live their lives.

From Abram's definition, it can be interpreted that Myths are created to teach people about something important and meaningful. Myths are often used to teach people about events they don't always understand, such as disease and death, or earthquakes and floods. Moreover, Rose (2005, p.8) stated that myth is a primitive

form of a mental process that ultimately produces an artistic and imaginative art and science form through a visualization process.

The critique of myth is also stated by Frye (1957). According to Frye, myth is based on anthropological and psychological approaches. Myths as part of rituals and folklore to restore spiritual content to a society fragmented by science, empiricism, and technology. The critique of a myth considers the creation of myth (with its relation to magic, imagination, dreams, etc.) as an integral part of human thought; and myth as a collective cultural effort to construct a meaningful context for human existence. Therefore, literature is seen as the core of the creation of myth.

Animals and plants also play an important role in recorded oral traditions and myths from various cultures around the world, both ancient and modern. It is seen those mythical animals are in line with those stated by Propp (1968) about things that function as magical creatures, namely (1) animals (horses, eagles, etc.); (2) objects from which magical aids arise such as a flint containing a horse, a ring containing a young man; (3) objects that have magical properties, such as clubs, swords, balls, etc. (4) powers bestowed by supernatural

figures and the power to transform into animals. All of these things by Propp are called “magic agents”.

Similar to many places in the world, Lampung has a richness of oral traditions that are quite a lot. This oral tradition which is passed down from generation to generation by the ancestors is stored in the people of Lampung. Many Lampung folk tales contain myths that contain certain messages. This can be seen in the folk tales that we have managed to collect. It contains messages for their posterity about norms and values. Cultural values are instilled in the form of a rule that lives in the minds of some residents, which is considered valuable and important in the order of people’s lives. The rules in the form of cultural (customary) values serve as community guidelines, to regulate the procedures for human behavior according to the life of the community concerned. It is stated in Lampung’s cultural values as a philosophy called *piil pesenggiri*.

Piil pesenggiri is a view or philosophy of life for the people of Lampung in which there are noble values that set a foundation that can be used as a guide to determine what is good and bad, should and should not, necessary and unnecessary, and the like, about life problems to maintain themselves (Fachrudin, Suharyadi, & Irham, 1999, p. 1). With this philosophy of life, life will be better and more useful.

For this reason, this paper wants to reveal one element of the myth contained in the folktale: depicting animals as sacred creatures contained in folklore. How are these mythical animals described and what animals are mythical in Lampung folklore? And how did the folktale shape the harmonization and social order and system belief of the people of Lampung?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Myth, as it is generally understood, is a narrative about magical or heroic creatures traditionally handed down through oral tradition, and related to the spiritual life of a community which is legitimized by community leaders and indigenous peoples who try to keep it preserved with a specific purpose. Along with the oral storytelling, the details of the story slowly change and are made more fantastic. Often, they feature fantastic animals with amazing, magical, or supernatural elements (Simpson 2000, p.254). According to Ross (2000), in societies that have an oral tradition culture, myths are considered carriers of belief systems and values. Myth is regarded as a significant representation of the whole in human experience while giving it form and expression.

Several studies are showing mythical animals about giant birds appearing in various cultures. For example, the myth of the giant bird is found in the Talmud and the bar yokhani which narrates about the egg of a giant bird that fell and drowned hundreds of cities and many forests.

The egg is Exilarch’s son, and the giant bird is Exilarch, a descendant of King David (Nissan, 2018).

Mythology about animals is also found in eastern Indonesian communities in the Manggarai and Sumba areas. The research conducted found myths about birds related to the cycle of human life, about good-bad and life-death. The symbol is represented by the friar bird which represents morning (light) and the imperial pigeon which represents dusk (darkness) (Forth, 2007).

There is also research about animal myth in Young (2014) that revealed about Goddess Kuu Nua in ancient China who fought against black dragons. The black dragon in East Asian myth is an animal that symbolizes evil. Metevelis (2000) discussed the study of Asian mythology about animals that also contributed to European mythology, namely the myth of Sirius (from Roman and Greek mythology) which is one of the suns and is considered the brightest in the constellation of the big dog (Canis major). The Miao people of southern China have folk tales that tell of Sirius and the ten suns constantly rising, causing a long drought and the death of trees. As a result, the king ordered the archers to shoot the sun. The sun then fell and hid in the mountains, making the world dark and cold. Finally, the king ordered the beast with a loud voice to call the sun back. The lion dog and golden cow failed to summon the sun to rise and the rooster crowed so that finally the sun rose again. In Encyclopaedia Britannica (2022) it is stated that there is East Asian mythology about a dragon named Lung that is considered a Yin and Yang force. Dragons are mythical creatures which are generous. He is considered a representative of heaven and a symbol of manhood in Chinese cosmology. The dragon in ancient times was the symbol of the kingdom.

Although not many studies have been conducted regarding this mythical animal, this paper will present some of the papers that have been found related to this topic.

3. METHOD

This study took place in four research areas, namely Central Lampung Regency, West Lampung Regency, Way Kanan Regency, and West Tulangbawang Regency. The places where the data was collected were chosen because based on initial observations, the places are rich with oral literature.

The research method uses the descriptive analysis method. The steps are carried out in two ways, namely literature study by looking for folklore reference sources and at the informant’s house by conducting an interview process. The researcher was present directly at the informant’s house and conducted interviews based on the interview guidelines that had been prepared and recorded the folk tales told by the informants.

We selected informants from indigenous peoples and oral literature figures in the four districts and then interviewed them. We recorded the folklore in the area and then selected the folklore data related to the mythical animals of the people of Lampung. The results are then processed and applied using myth theory.

The data collected were analyzed with a qualitative approach interactive model as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) which consists of three main things, namely, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research was conducted based on field data collection in four districts in Lampung province and the results of searches from literature studies about what animals are mythical and how these animals are described in Lampung folklore.

4.1. *Myth as The Embodiment of Harmony and Social System for the People of Lampung*

The creation of myths is a way to establish a relationship with the universe. The myth remains alive as an effort to preserve nature, especially for the people of Lampung.

The belief and worship of the Lampung people in the past for the universe is a belief that has long existed and is believed by the community which has been the basis for the life of the Lampung people from generation to generation. This was stated by Arif, one of the informants who came from the indigenous people of Central Lampung. He revealed that the people in the past had beliefs based on ancestor worship; believe in the existence of other spirits in the natural surroundings where he lives, so it is also necessary to be worshiped and believe in the existence of supernatural powers in all extraordinary things or objects.

This belief can be seen in folklore about the origin of the *Way Seputih* (Seputih river). In the story, it is said that in ancient times there was a white crocodile who was sleeping, but unfortunately, the crocodile has a large body. Eventually, the body blocked the flow of water. Everything was done to wake the crocodile so that the crocodile could move, but these efforts have yet to manage. The people of the village had been in that place for days looking for ways and means to get the crocodile to get up and leave the place. They began to despair and run out of ways to move the crocodiles. They decide to return to the village where they agreed to return when they find a way to deal with the crocodiles. They intend to find a person that has extraordinary power to remove the crocodiles.

For days the battle between the white crocodile and the holy man took place, in the end, the white crocodile

was defeated by the holy man. The white crocodile's body was injured badly enough to die and fell into the water. From the crocodile's body came white blood instead of red. Its white blood mixed with water so that it was white like the blood of a white crocodile. When the water flows again, it is white like milk because it is mixed with the blood of a white crocodile.

According to another informant, Agus Salim from Central Lampung, there is another version of the story of the white crocodile from the folklore entitled *The Story of Ulek Bunian*, which is one version of the story of *Gunung Sugih*. As the name implies, "*Gunung Sugih*" (mountain treasure) is a treasure that comes from someone named Minak Sengaji Mentanah. Local people believe, the pile of treasure is located around the Way Seputih river. The river in question is in the Tulungbuyut area, Central Lampung. This crocodile appears several times a year. Every time he appeared, someone from the village would disappear somewhere. This crocodile dwells in the river and when disturbed will reveal its large form. According to the story, this crocodile guarded the treasures stored at the bottom of the Way Seputih river. The informant stated that there had been a vision from the paranormal that in the river the treasure was buried, guarded by a white crocodile so that it could not be found and taken by people. Until now the local people still believe in the story.

The Garuda bird which is the symbol of the Indonesian state also has its myth. As told by our informant named Asrul, according to the belief of the people in Tulungbuyut village, the garuda is a bird that comes from that village so the bird is sacred. In harmony with Garuda as a symbol of the state, the garuda bird from the village is considered a bird that has supernatural powers so the creature is considered sacred.

The myth about the harmony of humans and the natural environment also appears in the myth about the dragon beast that guards Lake Ranau in West Lampung Regency. This place is one of the districts in Liwa, part of the Balik Bukit sub-district. This district is dominant with hills and has a very wide coffee plantation. The mountainous area is the ridge of the Bukit Barisan in the Batu brak area. *Sekala Beghak* (commonly written as *Skala Brak*), is an area where the heritage of civilization can now be seen. This area has historical relics of the past in the form of menhir stone sites. Rahman, the informant we interviewed tells a story about a dragon myth that is believed to inhabit Lake Ranau. This dragon comes from the *kelekup gangsa* (golden clapper) which has supernatural powers to cure all diseases. This *kelekup* became the target of thieves. Once, a thief managed to snatch the clapper so that the *kelekup* was thrown into the lake and turned into a dragon. Dragons will inhabit the lake and will appear when the lake is polluted.

This study also took data from an old village in the district of Tulangbawang Barat, which was named Karta

village. Based on the oral tradition of *Tiyuh Karta* in the Tulangbawang Udik District, there is a community belief that the Karta people are descendants of *Putri Bulan* (*Buay Bulan*), namely Sang Adam who emigrated in the XIII century from the Skala Brak area and descended from immigrants from Banten.

In Tulangbawang Barat Regency, there are also folklores related to dragons. The folklore tells about the monument of Nago Besanding. According to the story, in ancient times, a king must have a strong and dashing physique. In addition, a king must also have a vehicle that can represent the power and greatness of the king. Therefore, the dragon was chosen as the vehicle that the king would use to make it easier to take care of his people. Dragons as mythical creatures are believed to like to help and hate evil behavior. As a tribute to the majesty of the dragon, the people of Tulang Bawang Barat built an icon called Tugu Ratu. Dragons are considered one of the strengths of the King and Queen in leading the kingdom to achieve power. Dragon as a glorified animal by the Lampung people also has its myth in Lampung society. Amran (2016) stated that it is believed that the Lampung people come from the descendants of dragons. The dragon brought down the tribes that currently exist in the province of Lampung. There is a belief that *Buay* (descendants) Lampung comes from dragons that incubate eggs, and each egg inherits the tribes in Lampung. The dragon even as an imaginary creature is considered a symbol of strength by the people of the Lampung tribe. The dragon symbol is usually attached related to power such as a king. Dragons are considered protectors of evil things, so myths about dragons are quite common in the Lampung oral traditions.

The relationship between humans and the natural environment is also seen in the myth about turtles. The Lampung area is known as an area whose geography is in the form of sea and mountains. Somewhere in Waykanan Regency, there is an area called *Kasui*. The location is in the mountains and there are many rivers and waterfalls. One of these waterfalls is called Curug Gangsa. according to the local indigenous figure we interviewed, the waterfall is named *Curug Gangsa* (yellow waterfall) because according to residents, the yellow color appears. After all, the turtles are entrenched at the bottom of the river. The waterfall falls continuously on the back of a yellow turtle so that the spilled water looks yellow. Since then, the waterfall is called *Curug Gangsa* and the water is believed to have certain benefits.

Several folk tales containing myths can be recorded based on interviews with an informant from the local community named Jaya from West Tulangbawang regency. He tells several folk tales that contain myths, namely the myth of the Crocodile demon. He tells the story that a long time ago there lived a mighty man who had supernatural powers. In the story, it is mentioned that the man was cursed to become a crocodile and has lived

until now. According to the story, the incarnation of the male crocodile demon often appears around the Batanghari Wai Kiri river. According to local folklore, the crocodile devil is the embodiment of a magical human who was cursed to become a crocodile and is still alive today. The crocodile demon lives in Batanghari Waykiri and frequently attacks fishermen or anyone who crosses the Waykiri River. The crocodile demon is believed by local people as the guard of the river.

A story about a crocodile with another version is also told by a resident of Tiyuh Karta, West Tulangbawang Barat, named Roni. He narrated a story about the stump crocodile stealth. It is said that in ancient times it was believed that there lived a crocodile that did not have a tail, which was nicknamed the stump crocodile. This crocodile is believed to be the ancestor of residents who are considered half human and half crocodile. Stumped crocodiles will appear when the weather is hot and rainy. People believed This stump crocodile can only be seen by certain people. The Pagardewa people in Tulangbawang Barat Regency believe that the stump crocodile is the guardian of the Tulangbawang River that crosses the Pagardewa river. The myth about crocodiles has become the belief of the surrounding community to protect the river as part of nature that benefits the community. This kind of belief is to raise awareness for humans to synergize with nature. Humans must be good at utilizing and preserving nature. The balance of nature and humans will produce harmony and stability to avoid natural disasters.

Based on stories about dragons, crocodiles, and turtles all contain messages about harmony with nature. These imaginary animals are mythical so that humans can take care of nature around them. This can be seen in stories about crocodiles guarding rivers, dragons guarding lakes, and turtles living in waterfalls, all of which are related to nature and the environment. These animals are mythical so humans do not destroy these places.

4.2. Myth as The Embodiment of Harmony and Social System for the People of Lampung

Stories related to a prohibition or taboo appear in the myth of deer animals found in the West Lampung district. This animal is told to help the King of the Sukabanjara kingdom, named Raja Seranjang. King Seranjang fought against the Dutch troops and was saved from death by a deer. Since then the deer and Prabu Seranjang have had an agreement so that the people of Sukabanjara Village do not eat deer meat.

The story of this taboo related to animals also has another version in the Waykanan district. As told by an informant name Safar from Waykanan district, it is told about the myth of the jungle fowl. It is taboo for the people of Mount Sangkaran, especially *Buay*

(descendants) of *Bahuga* to eat jungle fowl. This is because the jungle fowl have lost in the fight so the descendants of *Buay Bahuga* are forbidden to eat the jungle fowl because the jungle fowl is considered a symbol of defeat.

The story is as follows. The people of Waykanan, especially in the Mount Sangkaran area, were forbidden to eat forest fowl. It is said, once upon a time their ancestors went cockfighting. The tradition of cockfighting is a form of strength of a person or a people. When their ancestors did the fights, they used jungle fowl. The jungle fowl was chosen because this chicken is very good at fighting. However, unexpectedly, it turned out that this jungle fowl day was lost in a cockfight. Since then, the ancestors of Mount Sangkaran vowed not to use and eat the jungle fowl because it had made him lose. If they continue to use and eat jungle fowl, the disaster will affect their posterity. The story of this jungle fowl becomes a symbol of humans protecting the rare animals and their habitats. It is seen that the ancestors of the Waykanan people took early prevention so that these animals do not become extinct. In line with the story of the deer from the West Lampung district, the folktales have substance prohibitions that contain the local community's belief in the law of causality, breaking the law will result in something bad happening.

An informant from Tulangbawang regency also tells folk tales related to the caterpillar demon. He told of a caterpillar that transformed into a man and preyed on the wife he married. The story tells about a mother who is exhausted from having to clean her garden and yard and swears that if there is someone who can clean it in an instant she will marry him to her daughter. It turned out that there was a caterpillar demon who heard her oath. The demon carries out its duties and the mother marry the demon with her child. On the night of the wedding, the demon preyed on her child so that the mother regretted her carelessness. The story of this caterpillar demon symbolizes greed with the image of a caterpillar as the embodiment of pests that damage crops. The damage done by this caterpillar is represented by the action of the caterpillar demon preying on the wife he married. Thus, society manifests the symbol of evil in the form of a destructive animal represented by a caterpillar.

An important element in the original beliefs of the Lampung indigenous people in the past was the belief in ancestral spirits who were believed to be around them. In general, they believe in spirits such as guardians of villages, forests, rivers, springs, and so on. In this myth about animals, we find value in the relationship between humans and nature. The value seen from the myth about crocodiles with all the versions is in the form of harmonization of humans and nature in protecting the environment.

Humans need nature to survive by providing food and other life support needs. The thing that needs to be

understood is that nature takes time to develop until it can be used by humans. Therefore, humans must take advantage of the natural potential that exists while still thinking and considering the balance, both the stock and the supporting ecosystem. In this notion, it can be seen that the folklore of the Lampung people is passed down through generations and was intended by the ancestors of the Lampung tribe so that their descendants protect the environment so that natural balance is formed. This wisdom element is inserted through folklore that is easily accepted by his descendants.

According to the informants we interviewed, folk tales containing myths about these animals were obtained from their parents and grandparents. It is stated that they are expected to pass the folklore on to their descendants as a form of appreciation for the ancestors of the Lampung people. In this regard, according to the informants, all tribes in the province of Lampung have customary community institutions that oversee their customs and traditions. These community institutions in most districts are protected and facilitated by the government to preserve the ancestral traditions of the Lampung tribe.

5. CONCLUSION

The people of Lampung, especially those who still hold on to customs and traditions as their guide for life, believe in supernatural powers in the form of animals as an effort to protect nature and ancestral heritage from damage and extinction. The people of Lampung also appreciate the folklore that lives in society by transmitting folklore through oral traditions, both within the family scope, as well as the local government which has begun to make policies that lead to the protection of the traditions of the Lampung people. Through folklore, the function of the mythical animal is seen, and why is it mythical by their ancestors. Folklore in its various forms is part of a very valuable asset, the contribution of local wisdom to values in family life, personal attitudes, and social life.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors declare that they have equal contributions as the main contributors. They have read and approved the final paper.

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