

Local wisdom of Balinese Agricultural Rituals

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Abstract—*Balinese society is the society that still holds fast to religious traditions related to agriculture. It is depicted by the various rituals conducted in the agricultural activities. This study attempts to reveal the local wisdom in the agricultural rituals conducted by Balinese farmer community. The data is collected by employing the ethnographic method, conversation, and interview. Then, the data is analyzed utilizing qualitative descriptive method which refers to the applied theories. The results of this study demonstrate that the local wisdom contained in Balinese agricultural rituals comprises the categories of idea including various cultural knowledge, perspectives, values, and practices of Balinese farmer community which are obtained from the ancestor's heritage. The local wisdom also comprises the ecological wisdom since the ritual in preventing rice pest utilizes natural materials which are environmentally friendly. The local wisdom of the agricultural rituals is the implementation of Balinese Hindu communities' philosophy of life named Tri Hita Karana, that is the three connections that cause happiness; the connection of human and God (parahyangan), human and community (pawongan), as well as human and nature or environment (palemahan).*

Keywords—*agricultural rituals; Balinese farmer community; local wisdom; Tri Hita Karana*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since a long time ago, besides being well-known for its tourism industry, Bali island is also famous as the rice granary. This is demonstrated by the large number of rice fields cultivated by farmers. The existence of rice fields in the form of terrace becomes the panorama which supports the tourism industry. The existence of rice fields is closely related to the preservation of agricultural cultural traditions conserved by Balinese farmer community as the characteristic of a religious agrarian community.

One of the agricultural traditions executed until today is the performance of rituals related to the agriculture. The rituals are performed from the initial stages of working on the rice fields to the postharvest ritual. The tradition closely related to Hinduism is performed for generations. For Balinese Hindu community, ritual is a form of ceremony which is connected to the belief or religion marked by the specific natures that generate the noble respect aimed to the Highest, that is God.

The religious system in the form of agricultural rituals of Balinese farmer community contains the local wisdom. Local wisdom is the cultural wealth that grows and thrives in a community which is known, believed, and recognized as the important elements which is able to strengthen the social among the community (Haba, 2007), as well as all actions of the local community in carrying on their lives with the environment (Minsarwati, 2002). This local wisdom is essential to discover and revitalize so that its meanings and functions can be comprehended well by Balinese society, specifically the farmers and the young generation in general.

Therefore, this study aims at discovering the local wisdom in the agricultural rituals of Balinese society and finding the cultural strategy to preserve Balinese tradition and culture as the ancestor's heritage. This is crucial since, in the midst of the onslaught of global culture, some efforts should be performed so that the agricultural tradition and culture containing local wisdom do not become extinct. Losing a culture means losing a civilization. Thus, agricultural culture including the rituals must be preserved so that it will not vanish due to the modernization and globalization.

With the in-depth understanding on the religious and cultural tradition, Balinese society is expected to maintain their agricultural land for their own food sustainability and security as well as to preserve the local culture to support the tourism industry in the future. The local wisdom contained in the agricultural rituals is expected to be the guidelines in cultivating the agricultural land and maintaining the environment. The concept is closely related to the concept of *Tri Hita Karana*, that is the concept that regulates the connection between human and the nature and environment, human and other humans, and human and God.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Local Wisdom

When discussing about local wisdom, it cannot be separated from the language and culture of its community. According to Levi-Strauss (2006:24), the language employed by a community is considered as the reflection of the entire culture of the community. Thus, many experts consider that culture cannot be separated from the language and its utilization in the community.

Also, Geertz (1973) stated that the local wisdom is a part of culture and becomes an element of traditional culture rooted in human life and its community that is related to the human resources, cultural sources, law, economy, security, and so on. Moreover, the local wisdom is also a local knowledge created from a community's adaptation result that comes from the life experience communicated through generations. In relation to the agricultural rituals, this local wisdom is a local knowledge employed by the local community to survive in an environment that merges with the belief system, norm, culture, and expressed in the traditions and myth that are held for a long time.

The traditional belief is seen as the indigenous knowledge and becomes a source of empirical information and crucial knowledge that can be improved to complete and enrich the overall scientific understanding. The wisdom also contains many descriptions about the assumption of the related community on the things related to the quality of human environment and the relationship of human beings and their natural environment. Therefore, it can be said that the local wisdom as the cultural capital manifests as the cognitive and evaluative aspects which are believed and recognized as the crucial elements, so that the local wisdom is practiced in the daily life in order to actualize the harmony or cohesiveness of the relationship among human beings and human with the environment (Haba, 2007). Meanwhile, Sutanto (2004) mentioned that the local wisdom clings to the idea that "... human and nature are a unity or a part of the mighty whole that interact and interrelated dynamically in the welfare of human life context" (in Atmaja, 2008).

B. Metaphor

Metaphor is an allusion that utilizes a word or phrase referring to a certain object or act to replace another word or phrase so that there is a resemblance or analogy between them (Jacobson in Budiman (2011)). Metaphor is not only related to a word or phrase, but it is also often related to the visual forms such as sounds, gestures, and so on. This study employs the metaphor theory from Pierce who divides metaphor into several typologies. The icon type sign can still be divided into several subtypes, that is image (image icon), diagram (diagram icon), and metaphor (metaphoric icon). Metaphor is the icon that is based on the similarity between objects of two symbolic sign. Metaphor is basically a metasign, and metaphor is a sign created over another sign (usually two symbols).

C. Cultural Meaning and Value

According to Koentjaraningrat (1987:85), cultural value consists of conceptions living in the mind of most citizens regarding the things they consider as noble. Kluckhohn (1952) defined the cultural value as the organized general conception that affects the behaviors related to nature, human position in nature, relationship among human beings, and regarding the wanted and unwanted things that are probably interrelated to the relationship between human and the environment and among human beings. Furthermore, Kluckhohn stated that cultural value is a broad-scope concept that lives in the mind of most citizens regarding what is valuable in life. The value system becomes a guideline that is closely attached in an individual or a group of people emotionally, even become the purpose of life that they fight for. Those values are the ideal forms of their social environment.

D. Religious System

Ritual belongs to the religious system. Koentjaraningrat (1996) stated that religion is a system that consists of the believed concepts and become an absolute belief of a religious community together with the ceremonies and religious leaders who perform them. The existence of belief generates the religious system that contains five elements, that is: (1) religious emotion; (2) belief system; (3) rite and religious ceremony system; (4) religious group that conceptualizes and activates the religion along with the religious system; (5) equipment in religious ceremony or rite. Therefore, the performance of this agricultural ritual becomes a religious system due to the connection with those five elements.

III. METHOD

This study is conducted in the Second Subak of Pasedahan Yeh Lauh which is located in North Denpasar, Denpasar City. Considering this study is a field study, the instruments are the interview guideline, tape recorder, data of agricultural ritual texts of Balinese society, and the researcher herself as the human instrument (Duranti, 1997:85). Therefore, the data and information collection are conducted by observation and interview with the cultural actors, such as the customary elders, traditional authorities (saints), and farmers themselves.

The data analysis is conducted in a qualitative descriptive and interpretative way. The obtained data is classified in such a way then interpreted and analyzed comprehensively. The utilized method is the experimental analytical method (Alwasilah, 2007); the identity method with the support from the relevant studies or theories. As stated previously, the scope of this study is discovering the local wisdom of agricultural rituals as the tradition of agricultural culture in Bali. Based on the method and data analysis technique, the researcher attempts to analyze the data, correlate them with the context of situation and culture to obtain the local wisdom (ecology) in the agricultural ritual, and describe them based on the context and philosophy of Balinese society and culture.

IV. DISCUSSION

Generally, the local wisdom can be classified into two categories, that is the idea and the concrete matters. The category of idea comprises various cultural knowledge, perspective, values, and practices of a community, both obtained from the previous generations and from today's community, including contact with other cultures and communities. The local wisdom of concrete matters includes the artifact objects that decorate human life and have symbolic meaning.

In accordance with the local wisdom categorization, the local wisdom in this agricultural ritual belongs to the category of idea since the ritual comprises cultural knowledge, perspective, values, and practices in the form of ritual performance obtained from the previous generations or ancestors.

Every step of rice field cultivating activities in Balinese farmer community is initiated with the agricultural ceremony or ritual. The rituals performed starting from before working on the field to the postharvest ritual. Every performed ritual has the certain purpose and objectives. The following are local wisdom and symbolic meanings of agricultural rituals carried out by Balinese farmer community.

A. *MendakToya*

The ritual of *mendaktoya* or picking up water is the ritual performed in the water sources as the symbol of honor to the water ruler in the lake or river, that is Goddess Ganga. The farmers present the offerings and beg to be given the abundant water for the agriculture. This ritual is performed in the fountains like the lake or upstream as the water sources. The local wisdom of this ritual is the knowledge that preservation of water sources is crucial for human sustainability, including the agricultural fertility.

B. *NgendagMemacul*

The ritual of *ngendagmemaculis* is the ritual performed when it is time to start hoeing the fields. Before starting to hoe the fields, there is spell pronounced to Goddess Sri, that is "*Om Bhatari Sri wastuyanamaswaha*". This ritual text means solicitation and worship to Goddess Sri to ask her permission to start a work, that is hoeing the field for the first farming activity. The local wisdom contained in this cultural product is the implementation of Balinese community concept, that is *Tri Hita Karana*, the three connections that cause happiness. In this context, the permission request to the motherland depicts that the land and field are the creation, grace, and possession of God, so that it is normal for the farmers to ask for permission and blessings that their work will be smoothly performed.

C. *Ngurit*

Nguritor also called *asmawinihis* is the ceremony of sowing the seeds. The seed sowing is also initiated with the ritual to beg to Surya, the Sun God, for giving the growth to the seeds being sowed. The symbolic meaning is that Balinese farmer community is the religious community who believes in God Almighty so that everything performed will remind them to Him. This belongs to one of the concepts of *Tri Hita Karana*, that is the three connections of human and God, other human beings, and environment.

D. *Nandur*

The word *nandur* means planting rice. The ritual of *nanduris* is the ritual performed to start planting rice. Before starting the activity, the rice field is treated with certain offerings. The offerings contain the symbols related to the tradition and belief of Balinese farmer community. The spell uttered is also the request of grace to God so that the Gods as the manifestation of *Ida Sang Hyang Widi Wasa* (God Almighty) raise and fertilize the rice that starts to be planted.

E. *The Ritual of Rice Plants Aged 12 Days, 35 Days, 42 Days, and 70 Days*

The agricultural ritual for the rice plants is completed with the different ceremonial means in accordance to the age of the rice plants. This demonstrates that the cultural tradition of treating rice plants like humans as in the Hindu tradition in Bali perform rituals when a child enters certain ages. When the rice plants are twelve days old, the offerings are supplemented with porridge which likens a baby who can only eat porridge, thus this ritual is also called *asmubuhin* (giving porridge). This process equates rice plants with babies who can only eat porridge. There is a metaphor, in this case, namely the process of human life is equated with the life process of rice plants.

At the age of thirty-five days, the day is called *dedinankapertama* (commemoration of one-month rice plant age). Similar with the ritual for human, at the age of one month, rituals are also performed for the rice plants. It also applies to the following ages, which are 35 days, 42 days, and 70 days. The ingredients used in the ritual are more complex according to the age of the rice plants. Like humans who start to grow older, they need different foods, as well as the rice plants. The ingredients and materials used in these rituals are adapted to the age of the plants and need to be controlled so that they can grow well. The symbolic meaning is that in the period of growth, rice needs to be controlled so that there are no obstacles in its growth, such as plant disease and pests.

F. *Byakukung*

The ritual of *byakukung* is the ritual for the rice plants that begin to contain grains (the ripe rice), which aims at eliminating danger and maintaining the safety of rice plants, so they can bear the grains and ready to harvest (giving birth) (Bandana, et al. 2010). This ritual is supplemented with *rujak*, tubers, young coconuts, and medicines. The condition of the rice plants that began to fill with the grains is likened to women who are cravings who usually like food like such. *Rujak* is a food preferred by women who are cravings. Then, the various types of tubers, such as taro, cassava, *biaung*, and sweet potato, are steamed and presented as the offerings. This has the meaning of foods rich in carbohydrate that is required for the fetus in the body of the pregnant woman.

What is fascinating from this ritual means is the yellow young coconut as the beverage, which is symbolized as the cleanser of the soon-to-be-born fetus. Besides that, the ritual is also equipped with the tools for childbirth, such as a bamboo knife (*ngaad*), eggshell, turmeric, and thread, which are placed in a container called *kronjo*. The knife is the symbol of the tool for cutting the placenta, the eggshell as the place of the placenta, the turmeric as the wound medicine, and thread as the means for tying the umbilical cord.

According to Suaka (2013), this ritual integrates the traditional and modern knowledge. The rice that starts to ripe will have the ovary (pistil) that sticks up like a lizard (*kumalasan*) and undergoes the pollination process. The pollen (like sperm) is the extremely fine powder that sits at the ends of the rice straw and will eventually fall. The fallen pollen is caught and accepted by the ovary (like mother's womb) underneath. It is this encounter that causes the ovary to become truly contained (sprouted). Without the drop of pollen, the fertilization of the ovary will never occur. This is in accordance with the word *byukung* which is derived from *bya* ("cost") and *kung* ("in love", "cravings"), *patemoningsuklalawanswanitaorkama bang lawankamaputih*. The meaning is generally about the encounter of the pollen and the pistil so that the fertilization occurs, and the rice becomes "pregnant" (ripen).

Every ceremony performed in the agricultural ritual is supplemented with various equipment. The signified (function) of the ceremonies apparently can be accepted logically in science. The signifier or meaning that can be obtained from the tradition is that when the rice is in a ripe condition (*beling/bunting*), the fields are completed with weathervane, *kober*, *sunari*, and *kentongan* (slit drum) (Suaka, 2013). Those instruments will generate the calm wind circulation (*ngesirsir*) so that it will assist the rice pollination by the drop of pollen to the pistil.

G. *Ngadegang Dewa Nini*

The ceremony of *ngadegang Dewa Nini* is the ceremony to create the symbols of the Gods of agriculture that are made from the rice ready to harvest. The symbols of the Gods consist of 108 rice straws (108 *badih*) as the symbol of men and 54 straws (54 *badih*) as the symbol of wives or women. These Gods are the Gods who provide fertility, that is Goddess Sri or Bhatari Sri as a wife. Dewi Nini as the embodiment of Goddess Sri in the belief of Balinese community is the goddess who provides life. Therefore, Balinese farmers always perform this ritual as the expression of gratitude toward the rice that is ready to harvest.

H. *Ngampung*

The ritual of *ngampung* (*manyi*) is the ceremony performed when it is time to harvest the rice. The ritual supplies consist of yellow rice completed with egg yolk and yellow flowers. Philosophically, this describes that yellow is the color of rice that is ready to harvest, so that it is illustrated with the offerings which are mostly yellow. Before the rice is harvested, the farmers perform the ritual of *mecaru*, that is the ritual of offerings to other creatures or power so that they will not disturb the harvesting process.

I. *Ngerasakin*

The ritual of *ngerasakin* (*mayahpengrasak*) or "paying the tax" in the field is the last ceremony after the harvest ends. Paying the tax in the context of this ritual is in the form of offerings (*pengrasak*) to God, specifically to His manifestation, that is Goddess Sri. This ceremony is the farmers' expression of gratitude to God for the successful harvest with chicken, duck, or pork roll as the means of ritual. The symbolic meaning of this ritual is the form of devotion or the kind of gift to God, specifically Goddess Sri and Goddess Uma as well as their followers, for His grace due to obtaining the good harvest.

J. *Nangluk Merana*

Besides the rituals performed by the farmers for the activities of field cultivation, another ritual related to the agriculture is the ritual of *nangluk merana* (the pest repellent ritual). The ritual of *nangluk merana* is the ritual performed to eradicate the pests that attack rice, such as rats, caterpillars, leafhoppers, grasshoppers, snails, bugs, birds, and so on. The wisdom that can be obtained from this ritual is the utilization of natural ingredients to prevent plant pests. The ingredients are *tri ketuka* (red onion, garlic, sweet flag), banyan tree bark, *empang* tree bark, Schefflera bark, urine of black buffalo, arrack, candlenut, and other environmentally friendly ingredients. Those ingredients are mashed or smoothed then some are spouted, spread in the fields, or poured into the water that flows into the fields. The utilization of the natural ingredients does not destroy all ecosystems since some are needed for fertilizing plants. In addition, the rice plants will not contain pesticides which result in poor health.

Of all the ritual stages performed by Balinese farmer community, it practically can be seen in two dimensions; the first is the knowledge, and the second is the practices in the form of interaction or action patterns. The tradition carried out by the current farmers is the knowledge obtained from the previous generations which contains the cognition about the harmony of life with nature, society, and the Creator. The knowledge is then implemented in the form of the act of performing the agricultural rituals. Those are the local wisdom that comprises the noble cultural values.

V. CONCLUSION

The local wisdom contained in the agricultural ritual of Balinese farmer community comprises the categories of idea including various cultural knowledge, perspectives, values, and practices of Balinese farmer community which are obtained from the ancestor's heritage. The local wisdom also comprises the ecological wisdom since the ritual in preventing rice pest utilizes natural materials which are environmentally friendly. The local wisdom as the cultural capital manifests as the cognitive and evaluative aspects which are believed and recognized as the crucial elements, so that the local wisdom is practiced in the daily life in order to actualize the harmony or cohesiveness of the relationship among human beings and human with the environment. The local wisdom of the agricultural rituals is the implementation of Balinese Hindu communities' philosophy of life named *Tri Hita Karana*, that is the three connections that cause happiness; the connection of human and God (*parahyangan*), human and community (*pawongan*), as well as human and nature or environment (*palemahan*).

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