

## WOMEN'S IMAGES IN KARONESE *SI BERU DAYANG* FOLKLORE: CULTURAL ASPECTS

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### Abstract

The *Si Beru Dayang* folklore is one of the cultural heritages in North Sumatra, and it belongs to Karonese society. Such folklore is believed to entertain the Karonese who still retell it to young generation according to its function since it contains local wisdom. This research is aimed at discussing women's images seen from the perspective of cultural aspects. Qualitative descriptive methods and interviews were used in this research. The data collection was obtained from recording and from informants' oral responses when they were invited during interviews; data was discussed from the domains of sociology of literature and from cultural aspects. The sociology of literature was focused on a number of concepts of women's images in the folklore. The results show that women are portrayed as *anak beru* (wife taker/daughter), *ndehara* (wife), and *sirukatnakan* (rice dipper) as symbols of origin of rice in Karo land, and as women in the merdang traditional ritual.

**Keywords:** *Local Wisdom; Women's Images; Karonese; Si Beru Dayang; Cultural Aspects*

### 1. Introduction

Gustavsson (2015: 247) has ever argued that in recent years, presentations of scholars' subjective experiences and reflections have been an object of increasing interest in Nordic ethnology and folkloristics. Korb (2014: 10-12) has noted two phases of Estonian folklorists' fieldwork in Siberia, for example, in 1991–2013 and of complex expeditions of Latvian culture researchers in Siberia in 1991 and 2004–2008. The former phase is aimed to "document folklore in its current state and observe the changes that have occurred in the tradition of Siberian Estonians under the influence of multicultural environment throughout times." The latter one is addressed to two: first, "to document folklore in its current state and to explore the folklore layers, the transformation, the absence of different kinds of contexts, the adaptation of new kinds of traditions, and second, folklore has been explored as an instrument of preserving Latvian identity and demonstrating it on stage at different festivities and festivals of national minorities in Siberia".

Folklore and "religion, ideology, tradition, rituals of an ethnic, as well as films of a country can be understood by direct experience" (Pawiro & Rangkuti, 2018: 50). In culture, there are characteristics or principal traits that are shared by all cultures, including: culture is the common property of a society living in a certain area where in life there is a more reciprocal "dependence" relationship between individuals who live in the certain area, have the same culture, where the community is a supporter of culture. In essence, without

society, it is impossible to have culture since society is a collection of individuals; no society means no human culture exists. It is important to realize that, although culture is the common property of community members, within culture itself there are differences, such as women and men's roles, gender, age, social stratification and others. "In cultural traditions or oral traditions in this archipelago there are a lot of cultural values and norms as the heritage the functions of which are to structure the social life of the community and they can be classified into two kinds of core local wisdoms, to uplift the welfare and to create peace" (Sibarani et al., 2018: 4). Karo Batak is one of "ethnics in North Sumatra" and its people "lives together with other local languages, for example, Malay, Toba, Simalungun, Dairi, Gayo, and Alas as well as with regional languages, for instance, Javanese, Padangese, Acehese, Chinese, and Indian" (Pawiro et al., 2016: 83).

## 2. Literature Review

Portraying feminine images of Indonesia's local women is important in the midst of world situation in which "Western culture has become 'sexualized' or even 'pornified'" (Hatton & Trautner, 2013: 65). Hatton and Trautner also quoted Kane (1996) who noted sexualized portrayals of women are a way to 'manage' and 'contain' their power (pp. 65-66). Yamamiya et al. (2006: 421) have ever took ideas from Wiederman (2000) noting that in Western and Westernized cultures, women's bodies are objectified and evaluated. Portraying women's images in the Indonesian context Brenner (1999: 15) has ever argued that "In recent years feminist scholars have paid considerable attention to the New Order state's gender ideologies and policies for women, their social and political implications, and the ways in which they influenced public representations of women, including the portrayal of women and gender relations in the mass media."

Even, Woyshner (2006: 358) has tried to collect a series of images on women's midnineteenth century dress reform efforts to both illustrate the importance of questioning images of women in textbooks, primary source materials, museums, and public art. Women's images can be taken from the images generated by the women's mind, hearing, sight, touch, or taste. The word "image" (or sometimes termed "delineation" [for this see Bjarnason 1956]) refers to the meaning of each reasoning conception. Bjarnason argued that the art of character delineation - *a conditio sine qua non* of a good story - was assiduously studied by these sagamen (p. 142). Sugihastuti (2007: 45) argues image means appearance, image which can be in the form of depiction that many people have about a person, or in the form of visually mental impression that can be felt from word, phrase, or sentence, and such impression becomes the distinctive basic elements in prose and poetry. Ganelli et al (2010: 5) contend that image is all forms of individual behaviors that are collected within him, which are used to react and adapt to all stimuli, both coming from outside himself or his environment or from within himself, so that individual behavior is the manifestation of his personality as a combination that arises from within the environment.

Hellwig (2007: 20) asserts that the parameter of women's image is a description of women in their lives in the domestic and public spheres. The depiction of women's image as independent women and as women who live trapped in patriarchal norms imposed on them as wife. The elements that form and build self-image include education, work, personality, family life, social life, environment, and lifestyle. Andrea (2007: 12) quoted Louis Montrose arguing Elizabeth's reign as exemplary of "the interplay between representations of gender and power in a stratified society in which authority is everywhere invested in men – everywhere, that is, except at the top."

Discussion on image cannot be separated from the cultural aspect, because all the behaviors of figures in society are determined by the culture owned by society. The community referred to in this study is the community created by the author and the whole way of human life as part of the environment is known as culture. As for culture by Kluckhohn (1959: 69) it is revealed that the whole way of human life, namely the social heritage, is obtained by a person and his group. Therefore, culture can be considered as part of the environment created by humans. Its relationship with the women's image in the "Si Beru Dayang (SBD)" folklore is that culture is connected with humans. This is based on the idea that the characters in the story are human beings created by the author who try to understand themselves, and understand their own behaviors, for instance, ways of thinking, feeling, and believing.

Karonese are known as hard-working people and their majority are farmers who are honest with the state of nature. Hard-working can be traced down from traditional expression *mbuah page ni suan, merih manuk ni asuh* (cultivated farms produce abundant spleens, and reared chickens breed). In principle, Karonese supports morally the concept of "to give first and then to receive later" (*endi enta*). Female Karonese living in rural areas are much more involved in supporting household needs compared to male one.

Folklore can be considered pure fictional story which is inspired by historical events, as well as by myths and legends depending on the events that lie behind them (Sari et al., 2017). Sumardjo et al. (1986: 36) argued folk tales can be interpreted as a cultural expression of a society through speech that is directly related to various aspects and the composition of values in that society. Folklore is usually in the form of speech that functions as a medium for disclosing behavior about the values of life inherent in people's lives (Bunanta, 1998: 21). Sutrisno (1981: 43) argues that folklore can be passed down orally and in writing, so research on folklore can include the incarnation and derivation of the text of a literary work, its interpretation, and understanding.

In Karonese SBD folklore, the role of Beru Dayang as a character and her mother can be used to restore the Karonese spirit to improve their agricultural products. In addition, in the folklore, the traditional ritual of *merdang* contains the cultural wealth that portrays farmer's hard work and efforts to harvest rice abundantly. SBD is fraught with the issue of gender inequality with the background of patriarchal culture. In fact, not all ancestral cultures always describe the privileges of men over women. Local wisdom that motivates or depicts women as strong figures exists certainly in SBD folklore. Therefore, in-depth exploration of cultural wisdom and women's status in SBD is important.

Myth exists basically from situation where everything in the universe does not work according to its laws and tries to explain the disharmony of nature, although it sometimes explains nothing. Many myths store local wisdoms that harmonize humans and their lives. Sibarani (2012: 112) believes local wisdom might refer to local knowledge of any society that comes originally from noble values of cultural traditions to regulate the order of people's lives as well as to cultural values. Research that discusses the delineation of women in Karonese folklore, on the basis of cultural aspects, can be seen from Susilo (2017). Folklore has values of local wisdom such as religious and social values, as well as cooperation values (Susilo et al. 2017). In relation to perception of the SBD Karonese splits into two perceptions: the first believes the SBD and the other disbelieves it (Lubis 2018).

Myth is one of the socio-cultural phenomena in folklore. In the sociology of literature, strategies to understand social action is done by considering people's lives which have complex networks but they are interconnected, dependent and meaningful; moreover, the

construction of social reality is owned by each member of a group, community or society. Levin (in Elizabeth, 1973: 66) contends that literature with its original content of art that boldly expresses the depths of the soul and the overall social reality can become individual as well as collective expression. Therefore, content analysis is functional to obtain a classification of myths in Karonese SBD. With reference to the concept of 'folk', folklore is not the only discipline that is interesting; traditional music is also fascinating. Davidjants (2015: 187) has ever discussed "peasant folk music with its common genres, such as work songs, ritual songs, lyrical songs, dance songs, and instrumental music".

Fikfak (2015: 51) has ever noted about political rituals in Austria's Carinthia. Such rituals refer to "practices set in concrete chronotopes and express and materialise a sense of belonging, the formation of identities, and the establishment of local, regional, ethnic, national, or state entities." Fikfak also reported that the rituals "represent an area of social cohesion, self-identification, the marking of social affiliation and the exclusion of the Other." Fournier and Sedakova (2015: 7) have reported that "traditional rituals can be adapted and transformed in new social and cultural settings, new historical contexts, or in relation with migrations or other geographical changes."

### 3. Research Method

The study was qualitative descriptive; Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 1998: 3) infer qualitative research is directed at the background and at the individuals holistically or at views as a whole. Qualitative research is a particular tradition in the social sciences that fundamentally relies on observing humans in their own area and relates the fields of social sciences and humanity to activities based on scientific disciplines to collect data, classify, analyze and interpret the facts and the relationship between the facts of nature, society, behavior, and human spirit in order to discover new principles of knowledge and methods (Kirl and Miller 1986: 9). Data was collected through observations, recordings and notes, as well as through interviews with Karonese. The sociology of literature approach was also used in this study because this approach focuses on a number of folklore and myth concepts in Karonese folklore. In the sociology of literature, there are strategies related to understanding social action by considering people's lives as a complex network, interconnected, dependent and meaningful, the construction of social reality that is owned by each member of a group, community or society.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Woman as Daughter, Wife and Rice Dipper

Karonese women face a dilemma in concept and in reality; they are conceptually so sublime and beautiful, but, in reality, their sublimation and beauty do not work properly and seem meaningless. Their middle names are always marked by *beru* or *diberu* 'daughter' for example, Murni Beru Perangin-angin or might appear in the short form *br.*, for instance Intan Br. Ginting. The word *beru* can also be translated as 'woman taken by husband', then a married woman belongs to her husband. However, Karonese women are usually identified by *beru* plus their nicknames, as shown in the following quotation: "It is said that in the midst of rampant suffering, there is an orphaned girl named Beru Dayang (BD) living with her mother. One day, BD is wailing in her mother's lap. Her face is pale, her body is only skin wrapped around her bones." (SBD)

Etymologically, it is not understandable when the word *beru* emerged and when it began functional. However, the word *diberu* itself comes from the word *mberu* 'beautiful'. If

a husband calls his wife *enda diberuku* 'this is my beauty', meaning no woman is more beautiful than his wife. Karonese women also have roles as *ndehara* 'wife', *nande* 'mother', *sirukat nakan* 'rice dipper', as well as *tukur emas* 'a woman who has been given a dowry to a man or lit. purchase gold' (Natar, 2004: 44). *Ndehara* is derived from the word *ndeher* 'close, imminent, sticky.' When a husband says *ndeharaku* 'my wife', what he means is that 'she is close to me, or no woman is closer to me than my wife.' In addition, Karonese women are also called *nande* who becomes a place to lean or plays a main pillar as indicated in the quotation to follow: "Nandena is sad to hear BD's cry. Her heart is like being slashed by a dagger. But what can she do, she does not have any food to give to BD. She can only hold her only daughter tightly. Her cheeks have been flooded with tears. "I am powerless, my daughter. I do not have a speck of food for you", she sobbed. Tears are flowing even more profusely." (SBD)

*Sirukat nakan* 'a woman who scoops rice' refers to a mother who shares her life and strength with family members. In the above quotation, the *nandena* designates to BD's mother. Karonese husbands often introduce their wives with the words *enda sikutukur* 'this is whom I have purchased'. On the other hand, Karonese wives also often introduce their husbands with the words *enda sinukur aku* 'this is the man who has bought me' (Natar, 2004: 45). In their role as *ndehara*, women call their husbands *perbulangen*, 'a man who wears bulang 'cloth' on his head'. The cloth is shaped to look like a crown; so, a wife may call her husband *perbulangen* 'my crown'. While in her role as *sirukat nakan*, a wife is more defined as a servant in the family, who does domestic works. Serving house works and working outside the home might become a wife's double duties. The term *tukur emas* also places women in a lower position than men. In accordance with the principle of *tukur emas*, a Karonese woman seems to have been bought by the groom. As the party who has been bought, she reaps bad treatment and abuse from her husband and also from her husband's family, even though she is only purchased at a price of 316, 416, or 516 thousand.

In Karonese culture, the term *kalimbubu* 'wife giver' is also known, who is believed as *dibata ni idah* 'the visible God' and is highly respected in the Karonese kinship system. A *kalimbubu* is believed to be the bearer of blessings. The attitude of opposing and hurting the hearts of *kalimbubu* is highly reprehensible. In a banquet, for example, the *kalimbubu* always gets the top priority, while the *anakberu* will not dare to precede the meal before the *kalimbubu* already starts eating food. When the *anakberu* by now finish eating, they will not dare to close their plate but they wait the *kalimbubu* to finish eating. Any disobedience to such situation is considered impolite.

Consider the following quotation to know how important *kalimbubu* is in a function. "The king and the fathers prepare the *daliken* 'three stoves/furnaces' which are made of *nderasi* and *lengit* wood. Each part of the stoves has a specific meaning, for example, the *daliken* symbolizes the kinship system involving *kalibumbu*, *senina* 'family members of the same clan', and *ras anak beru* 'wife taker'. The *nderasi* wood becomes the symbol of *kalibumbu* and *senina* while *lengit* wood of *anak beru*. Karonese take care of their kinship system." (SBD)

Since *kalimbubu* is highly respected, all their advice in a family meeting becomes input that must be respected by *ras anak beru* who is even ready to die to protect the honor of his wife's family. However, in reality, *ras anak beru* do not receive good tendance after giving high respect to *kalimbubu*. Only men have the right to pass their *merga* 'family name' to their son(s) and daughter(s). When a wife cannot give birth to a son, her husband can

divorce her and marry another woman to get a son (Tamboen, 1952:152). This is called *ndehara pejabu dilakina* 'the divorced wife.'

The divorced women must accept such condition which of course hurt their hearts or they feel disappointed with the condition. In a situation where a wife can give birth to a son, her husband is also under pressure and coercion from the community and his parents, although it is still the women who are mostly blamed. The consequences that arise from the condition are coercion, competition, and unfair tendance; unluckily, the *iperagiken* 'new wife' of her ex-husband takes part in blaming the divorced woman. Little change to such perception is going on from time to time right now to a better thought.

Unfair perception is also accepted by female baby who is named by her anak beru during the naming ceremony, while a male baby is named by kalimbubu. Giving name by anak beru indicates that this party bears duties and responsibilities to serve and prepare everything for kalimbubu. Since adult female will be sold to another male party, she will not receive better fund for education than a male does. This condition is relevant to the proverb: *man kai latih-latih adi dungna, man dayanken kang* 'why should we work hard to send them (daughters) to school if they will eventually be sold'. Apart from difficulties in education, female will not also get inheritance land from her parents. When her parents die, she only gets clothes and jewelry belonging to her parents. She does not receives inheritance land because, if she gets it, the land may fall into the hands of her husband's clans.

Gender differences are really found; men are responsible to do jobs that require great strength and agility, while women are given tasks that require patience as shown in the following quotation: "daughters who help their mothers do not miss the time to provide *belo bujur* 'a set of betels as thanks', *kampil indong-indong* 'betel container', *penggelebeng*, and the best rice seeds. The seeds are then inserted into the *sumpit perdanaken* 'small pandanus container'. The *uis ragi nteneng*, *cincin pijer*, and *gelang tumbuk* are also provided for BD." (SBD).

Daughters get domestic tasks, such as cooking, washing, ironing, and so on, as if they are prepared to become wives who take care of such tasks. They must marry because singleness bring disgrace to their families; sons take care of jobs outside the home such as raising livestock and planting crops. Daughters' duties and responsibilities seem to be much heavier because if there are irregularities in household matters, they are often beaten and verbally abused.

The following quotation describes BD's mother who shows her despair about life and decides to end her life after BD's death. "One dark gray night, Beru Dayang's mother stumbled towards the deepest river located at edge of the village. She was glued to the river bank with a blank stare. Unexpectedly, she was about to end her life. "O God of Heaven and of Earth! Allow. You take away my anguish and pain for ever!" screamed the middle-aged woman before finally plunging into the river." (SBD). The quotation shows the nature of women who are weak and easily discouraged or pessimistic so they are easy to commit suicide.

Wives take care of children, serve their husbands as well as work outside the home (such as to handle rice fields, farms, to feed livestock, to do sale, or to work in the offices) to increase their income and all this make their endurance psychologically and physically disturbed. As a result, they are exhausted and vulnerable to various diseases.

#### 4.2 Woman as Symbolic Origin of Rice in Karo

Symbol is basically a picture of social reality; the meaning of a symbol is a reality that can be found in the life of a community. Hodder (in Limahelu, 2019:208) argues the symbols proposed not only reflect but also play an active role in shaping and giving meaning to social behavior. However, in some situations, people judge that the symbols used are not in accordance with the actions that exist in society. The meaning of these symbols cannot be found in people's lives.

In SBD folklore, BD becomes the symbol of the origin of rice and is told to be the savior of the community at that time which was being hit by a drought. Due to hunger, BD finally died and his mother also committed suicide; she transformed into a big fruit which eventually became the forerunner of rice as indicated in the following quotation: "O Karonese. The large and beautiful fruit is the BD's incarnation, who has been sent down to earth. You cut smoothly the fruit into pieces and plant them. However, one thing you have to remember is that BD really misses her mother who becomes a fish in the deepest river at the edge of this village. Meet them. If the pieces grow and bear fruits, give her food. If you carry out this mandate well, then you will be released from the suffering of a long drought. Really you won't be hungry anymore!" the mysterious voice commanded. (SBD)

Karonese women do have noble souls, who not only take care of household chores and children, but also fulfill family's financial needs. They are respected if they have merit. The BD is considered meritorious because she helps people so that the traditional elders recommend the SBD a teacher of life, as indicated in the following quotation: "The traditional elders appealed to the King to make a place for Si Beru as a respected little girl so that BD feels at home to thrive in Karo land. Finally, BD lives in the paddy seedlings." (SBD)

#### 4.3 Woman's Status in Merdang Ritual

The involvement of women in the Karonese traditional rituals and discussions is rare; they are only event organizers in such rituals and discussion. The SBD folklore tells about male and female youths who work together to plant paddy. Men and their wives also work side by side during the merdang ritual. Consider the following quotation: "The king asked his people to work together in the *merdang* 'sowing seeds' ritual. It is believed the ritual is meant as a request to Beraspati Taneh (God of the Land) to look after paddy plants growing fertile with abundant harvests. The ritual begins in the *nangkih matawari* 'in the dawn'. People believe that working early in the morning brings fortunes to them; the ritual is chaired by paddy field land-lord. Cooperation makes work light; the king is also active during the ritual processions. The ritual ends in the afternoon and nobody complains about it.

### 5. Conclusion

From cultural aspects, in the Karonese "Si Beru Dayang" folklore, women's images are depicted in the following terms: *beru* 'daughters', *ndehara* 'wives', *sirukat nakan* 'rice dippers', symbols of rice, and active involvement as the event organizers in the merdang ritual. As daughters, women possess female marker *beru* or *br.* in their middle names or the marker appears exactly before family names. The word *beru* can also be interpreted as *beauty* appearing in expressions such as *enda diberuku* 'this is my beauty.' In case of *ndehara*, this term might appear in expressions of respect from husbands to wives, such as *enda ndeharaku* 'this is my wife' or *enda sikutukur* 'this is whom I have purchased' or from wives to husbands, for example *enda sinukur aku* 'this is the man who has bought me' or *enda perbulangenku* 'this is my crown'. With reference to *sirukat nakan*, this term might be

referring to nande 'mother' who always arranges dish on the table and scoops rice for husband as well as for children. After her death, the character BD is incarnated as rice; therefore, she becomes the symbol of the origin of rice since Karonese know anything about rice after BD passes away. Women who are labelled as anak beru can become the best event organizers when a ceremony or a ritual is held. They are given the right by their kalimbubu to be responsible for all activities when the ritual or the ceremony is going on.

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