

Traditional Knowledge of Jahai Tribe at Kampung Semelor, Gerik, Perak

Soijah Likin¹, Nazarudin Zainun² and Faridah Binti Jaafar³

¹ Anthropology & Sociology Section, School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

² History Section, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

³ Political Science Section, School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

Keywords: Traditional knowledge, Jahai tribe, taboo

Abstract: Values, norms, taboos are things that are created in the community as a means to regulate and social control in order to live in harmony and stability. Traditional knowledge is the power of the invisible but can force people to live with by the rules, taboos, values, norms set by society. Similarly, in the lives of Jahai's tribe which is practically a variety of taboo in many aspects of life. Traditional knowledge refers to the knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities that have developed over centuries and are traditionally transferred from elders to young people in concrete working and life situations. Traditional knowledge is dynamic and it can be transferred and expressed orally, through stories, legends, rituals, songs, and laws.

1 INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal identity is the first communities that inhabit Tanah Melayu (Benjamin, 1976). The results of archaeological research carried out in the Eastern and Northern Peninsula represents the *Orang Asli* of Peninsular Malaysia has been inhabited since the 8th century BC, which is about 10 thousand years ago (Khairul Hisham and Kamarudin Ngah Ibrahim, 2008). In Malaysia, The *Orang Asli* can be divided into three groups – the Semang (or Negrito), the Senoi, and the Proto-Malay (or Aboriginal Malay). This division is mostly sociological, as the groups differ linguistically, but possess similar cultural characteristics. Every groups divided into several tribe, namely Negrito (Kensiu, Kentaq, Lanoh, Jahai, Mendriq, Bateq), Senoi (Temiar, Semai, Memoq, Givé, Che Man, Jah Hut, Mah Meri), Proto-Malay (Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Kanaq, Kuala, Seletar (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, 2009). The *Orang Asli* can be divided into three groups – the Semang (or Negrito), the Senoi, and the Proto-Malay (or Aboriginal Malay). This division is mostly sociological, as the groups differ linguistically, but possess similar cultural characteristics.

Jahai community is one of the Negritos little compared with other tribes such as the Senoi and

Proto-Malay. Are believed to have migrated to Southeast Asia since 60,000 years ago with five other Negrito tribe in Malaysia have the physical characteristics of the different categories of Bumiputera Malaysia.

Most people *Jahai* have a small number of family members of three to six people. Aborigines are the indigenous people of the *Jahai* Negrito group.

Most of them inhabit the interior, particularly in the Northeast and the West Kelantan Perak (Amran Kasimin, 1993). The location of their placement is in *Banun*, *Sungai Tiang* and coastal *Temenggor Dam* in Perak and more concentrated in around Kampung Sungai Rual Jeli, Hulu Kelantan (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, 2009). The *Jahai* appearance person has in common with the people of Ethiopia, the African Negro, Negrito tribe in the Andaman Islands, Aeta Philippines.

Their modest home situation is due to the practice of those who love the nomadic, especially on death and disaster relief purposes other than for food needs in new areas. However, like other indigenous communities, they now have their own placement and taken care of all aspects of life through increased assistance from the government. (<http://www.jakoa.gov.my/orang-asli/info-orang-asli/pengenalan-orang-asli/>)

Traditional knowledge is the result of an adaptation of a community that comes from life experiences are communicated from one generation to another. So local knowledge is the local people used to survive in an environment that integrates with the system of beliefs, norms, culture, and tradition and is expressed in the myth that adopted for long periods of time. The regeneration of traditional knowledge is done through oral tradition (folklore) and literary works.

2 METHODOLOGY

The data about taboos Jahai's tribe obtained using the technique of the interview structure. According to Burn (1995), Merriem (1998) and Yin (1995) the use of design research, case studies using qualitative data is suitable if a study involving the observation of an individual or unit, a group of people, a family, a class, a school, a community, or cultural events. A case study should focus on a subject that has criteria or characteristics to be studied. This means that a review of case studies, mostly about individuals or events in the cultural environment and their environment (Burn, 1995).

Merriem (1998) stated the case studies are used to enhance a thorough understanding of the subject studied, focusing on aspects of the process rather than output, rather than concerned with the discovery of a theory or finding confirmation. According to Yin (1995) is a case study related to the research strategy that focuses on the question of 'who', 'why' or 'what'. This means that the case studies enable comprehensive or holistic research to know the features of a real-life event. To get a complete picture, a case study must collect data from various sources to enable an understanding of the research (Burn, 1995).

3 THEORY

Traditional knowledge refers to the knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities that have developed over centuries and are traditionally transferred from elders to young people in concrete working and life situations. Traditional knowledge is dynamic and it can be transferred and expressed orally, through stories, legends, rituals, songs and laws. It can also be preserved in artifacts handed from father to son or mother to daughter.

The Orang Asli have knowledge and understanding of their environment and ecosystems and ways how to use and manage them. Often this knowledge is very particularly and detailed. In recent years traditional knowledge has been increasingly considered alongside scientific knowledge within the context of research and conservation efforts related to Arctic peoples and nature.

Traditional knowledge has an important role to ensure the stability of society. Traditional knowledge is any guide, guidelines, norms, values for members of the public. Traditional knowledge is a social fact of Jahai's tribe. The concept of social fact has been introduced in the 19th century by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim called. Social facts are interpreted as a social phenomenon that abstracts e.g. legal, social structure, customs and habits, values, norms, language, religion, and the rules of life that have some power to enforce that rule exists in people's lives beyond the capabilities of the individual. In the book *Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim explains "social fact is every way of acting, whether fixed or not, and feel that there are outside forces as well as the individual and his capacity as the pattern formed in the society.

Since human beings are born indirectly it is required to act in accordance with the social environment in which he was educated and very difficult for him to break away from the rule. And feel that there are outside forces as well as the individual and his capacity as the pattern formed in the society. Since human beings are born indirectly it is required to act in accordance with the social environment in which he was educated and very difficult for him to break away from the rule. So when a person does other than what is expected by society, then it will get corrective action, ridicule, scorn, even got a penalty. In addition, the social fact that has 3 properties: external, public (general), and force (coercion) (George Ritzer, 2012).

1. External means these facts are beyond one's considerations and have been there just long before humans existed in the world.
2. Coercive (Force) Social facts have the strength to push and force individuals to accept and implement it. In a very real social fact that the individual is forced, guided, reassured, encouraged in some way affected by various types of social facts in their social environment.
3. Spread / general (General) Social facts are common or widely dispersed in society. In other words, the social fact is the common

property and not the individual nature of the individual. From the above characteristics, can be underlined that social facts point to something that exists outside individuals requiring them to follow the customs, manners, and respect for the common procedures performed as a member of society and relations between individuals by other individuals in a society. In other words, social facts such as the actions of individuals in contact with other members of the community who is guided by the norms and customs of a person so that they do patterned relationships with other community members. The indigenous people known as the *Orang Asli* are a community that has a relationship with the chronology of the Mesolithic and Paleolithic. They were the earliest inhabitants of the country. One side is very interesting about the original is to maintain confidence and taboos of their ancestral heritage. Although they are often considered by modern society as society uncivilized and primitive, but they were able to control their people from committing immoral behavior that is prevalent in modern society such as rape, incest, murder and so on.

4 TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF INDIGENOUS JAHAI

The indigenous people known as the First are a community that has a relationship with the chronology of the Mesolithic and Paleolithic. They were the earliest inhabitants of the country. One side is very interesting about the original is to maintain confidence and taboos of their ancestral heritage. Although they are often considered by modern society as society uncivilized and primitive, but they were able to control their people from committing immoral behavior that is prevalent in modern society such as rape, incest, murder and so on.

The Director General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Mayor, 1994) defines traditional knowledge: The indigenous people of the world possess an immense knowledge of their environments, based for centuries of living close to nature. Living in and from the richness and variety of complex ecosystems, they have an understanding of the properties of plants and animals, the functioning of ecosystems and the techniques for using and managing them that is particular and often detailed.

In rural communities in developing countries, locally occurring species are relied on for many - sometimes all - foods, medicines, fuel, building materials and other products. Equally, peoples' knowledge and perceptions of the environment, and their relationships with it, are often important elements of cultural identity.

Most indigenous people have traditional songs, stories, legends, dreams, methods and practices as a means of transmitting specific human elements traditional knowledge. Sometimes it is preserved in artifacts handed from father to son or mother to daughter. In indigenous knowledge systems, there is usually no real separation between secular and sacred knowledge and practice - they are one and the same. In virtually all of these systems, knowledge is transmitted directly from individual to individual

Taboos are community belief which is associated with culture and tradition. Many taboos and tips passed down orally from generation to generation. Taboos aimed to educate the public, especially the younger generation in order to lead to the implementation of good values that can be practiced in life. Some taboos are already a practice or principle in life today.

All taboos are actually in good of the people themselves. The taboo is a prohibition or an injunction against any conduct or conversation intended to prevent something bad from happening. Taboos are good things guide of the previous generation. According to this study informants Samat Bin Jeramun aged 34 years, residents Semelor consists of 28 families. The population of the village is 173 people. Each family usually consists of five to six people. The average rate Jahai's tribe age, married are 18 to 19 years.

After Resettlement Plan Banun, they moved because the government failed to fulfill the promises to give the rubber project and estates of oil palm to them. After settling in *Banun* they moved to various places like *Cium*, *Tiang*, *Telum*, *PulauTujuh*, *Semelor* and others. There is a total of 17 villages under Resettlement Plan Banun Banun. Covering an area of 40 acres of land in *Semelor* are the property of their own, but there are no grants. They have lived in *Semelor* for 30 years.

The organizational structure of tribal society Jahai is very clear. The role of women as mothers, wives and care for children. While the role of men as fathers, husbands and search of sustenance. Head of household is male. The division of wealth in society *Jahai* is bilateral. The property will be divided equally among the heirs of men and women.

Jahaimale collecting forest products such as rattan, *gaharu*, herbs, catching fish, hunting animal.

Most forest products will be sold to Chinese middlemen. Chinese middlemen coming to take the forest products. Indigenous Jahai not plant paddy and rubber because this plant is often interrupted by wild elephants. *Jahai* men rarely take care of the children. *Jahai* men responsible for hunting animals and collecting forest products. *Jahai* men not subject to any taboos. *Jahai* children aged under four years old are not allowed to eat monkeys and pigs.

Each Jahai's tribe village is led by a headman called *TokBatin*. The *TokBatin* role is directing villagers carry out planting project, working on farms, regarding the school. The *TokBatin* is also responsible for addressing social ills such as drinking alcohol, theft and security.

The Orang Asli community is rich with traditions and culture because the environment they are still closely linked to nature though has entered the modern world. Customs and beliefs they have a close relationship with the supernatural beings in the universe. The life philosophy of *Orang Asli* as revealed in the myths, customs, belief systems, the system of cosmology, taboos and so on. All of these characterize their attitude and character, the way they act and relation with nature and other human beings.

Almost all the *Orang Asli* have animist faiths. They create the impression that every object around them has a particular spirit or supernatural powers that can affect their lives. All the things that happen around them are influenced by certain objects that have supernatural powers. They strongly emphasized the relations with the universe. The harmony between nature and man is the key to prosperity and happiness of human.

There are many taboos in the form of ethos, mores and Folkways among this community that helped shape the personality and social life. Taboos practiced by Jahai's tribe also a taboo that has been inherited from ancestors. The taboos of Jahai's tribe is customary that have been inherited from their ancestors such as:

- a. At dusk, starting from 5 - 6pm, residents are not allowed to leave the house. The ban is intended to prevent interference of spirit.
- b. Pregnant women are not allowed to go to the bank of the river at dusk. This prohibition is to prevent pregnant women disturbed spirits.
- c. According to Jahai's tribe, while spirits causing various limb defects in the baby.
- d. Pregnant women should not eat monkeys, apes and pigs. They believe that eating meat

will cause the baby's body will be hot. They can only eat fish.

- e. Pregnant women cannot walk far.
- f. Pregnant women are not allowed in the forest for fear of being harassed spirits
- g. When baby at six months old should hold a feast and *Sewang*. The purpose of the feast and *Sewang* is to free the baby from abstinence. They believe that the ritual will prevent interference of spirit.
- h. Infants aged between 3-4 years old cannot eat pigs, apes, monkeys. They afraid that eating pig, apes, monkey will be transformed into a beast and will cause high fever and seizures. In the past, if Jahai's tribe is sick, they impregnated with a shaman. Now, the practices meet the healer is decreasing. They meet a doctor at the clinic for any problem about health.
- i. While in the forest cannot talk about bad things.
- j. Anyone who wants to enter the forest must have good intentions and goes by intention. Can not deviate from the original intention. For example, if the enter to forest to take the honey cannot take anything else.
- k. While in the forest cannot complain.
- l. The big tree in the forest cannot be cut down.
- m. While in the forest can only take plants or objects that are important and mature.
- n. A person can take timber after it was confirmed to have the core in it. Punching the timber is the method to find out the tree core. The timber must be abandoned if no core in. *Gaharu* tree can be taken piecemeal.

Now many *Tualang* trees to die. The main factors that cause the tree to die because the honey hunters using nails on the *Tualang* tree to make ladder (*sigai*) to draw honeycomb. Nails used on tramp tree and branches will damage the tree because the nails will rust. When a wind blowing strongly branches have spikes will fracture and eventually, the tree will die. Every *Tualang* tree has only one Queen Bee for all nests.

As for the *Orang Asli* they use ropes and bamboo to make ladder (*sigai*). They can achieve a honeycomb without damaging the trees. .

Petai is only available during certain seasons. Jahai tribe have method to know the *petai* is ripe or not by seeing the stalk. A straight stalk meaning the *petai* is ripe. Now *petai* in the forest is extinct slowly. For *Jahai* people, *petai* forest is much better than a banana.

Rattan is one of the important material in the life of indigenous people. Aside from being a source of revenue it is also the raw material for weaving. Most *manau* rattan have high demand compared theanother rattan. *manau* rattan is a species of large diameter and very important as raw materials in the furniture industry. It is highly sought after by collector's cane and does the price increase. Rattan *manau* can be identified by looking at the straight shape. If *manau* rattan is grown usually does not spread on the ground and bending and shiny. Rattan can cut if there are already 30 to 40 *katam*.

Most types of animals hunted in the forest are deer, roe deer and badgers. Starting in January and February they cannot catch the animal because the animals are mating. Animals should only be hunted in July alone.

5 CONCLUSIONS

One of the challenges facing the Indigenous knowledge is how to maintain and transfer it to the future generations? How one learns is as important as what one learns. Young people of today do not have concrete possibilities to take part in all seasonal subsistence activities. Parts of the traditional knowledge have faded since it is no longer needed among the younger generation and even if a younger member of the society shows interest in maintaining the traditional knowledge they might still lack the necessary practical ingredient.

REFERENCES

- Burn, R. B. 1995. *Introduction to Research Methods*. Melbourne : Longman
- Ritzer, George. 2012. *Teori Sosiologi, Dari Sosiologi Klasik Sampai Perkembangan Terakhir Postmodern*. Yogyakarta : Pustaka Pelajar
- Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli .2008. <http://www.jheao.gov.my> (15 July 2018).
- Merriem, S.B. 1998. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications In Education*. 2nd ed. San Francisco : Jasey – Bass.
- Yin, R.K. 1994. *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. 2nd ed. Thousands Qak Calif : Sage
- <http://www.perakgis.my/jakoa/index.php/component/content/category/11-suku-kaum-orang-asli>
- Informer : Samat Bin Jeramun,
Age: 34 years
Date of interview: 14 Mei 2016.
TokBatin Kg. Semelor.