

## Tracing The Role of Shamans and Their Rituals in the Sacred Hills of Bangka

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### **Abstract**

*Shamans have an important role in maintaining various knowledge, values and norms related to the relationship between humans and humans and nature. They are tasked with protecting sacred areas while carrying out rituals full of local wisdom values which are one of the keys to forest conservation. This research aims to explore the role of shamans and their rituals on a number of sacred hills on Bangka Island. Such as Penyabung Hill, Maras Hill, Mangkol Hill, and Nenek Hill. The research method is descriptive qualitative. Qualitative data obtained through interviews, observation and documentation were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The research results show that shamans play an important role in providing opinions and considerations regarding important matters concerning the survival of village communities. Shamans have a special position in the culture of the people on Bangka Island, and are tasked with ensuring that all knowledge or wisdom related to the environment is implemented or adhered to by the community for generations. Overall, the rituals on the sacred hills have the same meaning, namely as a form of gratitude for the natural results that have been obtained. Rituals also contain a lot of educational, educational value, as well as a wise way of living with fellow humans and nature. The application of the shaman's role and values in rituals is important for dealing with various current environmental problems. Through rituals, people are reminded of their dependence on nature and their responsibility to protect it.*

**Keywords:** Shaman, Ritual, Local Wisdom

### **Abstrak**

Dukun memiliki peran penting dalam menjaga berbagai pengetahuan, nilai-nilai, serta norma-norma terkait dengan hubungan antar manusia dan manusia dengan alam. Mereka bertugas menjaga wilayah sakral sekaligus melaksanakan ritual yang penuh dengan nilai-nilai kearifan lokal yang menjadi salah satu kunci pelestarian hutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelusuri peran dukun dan ritualnya di sejumlah bukit-bukit sakral di Pulau Bangka. Seperti Bukit Penyabung, Bukit Maras, Bukit Mangkol, dan Bukit Nenek. Metode penelitian adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Data kualitatif yang diperoleh melalui wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi dianalisis dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan dukun berperan penting dalam memberi pendapat, pertimbangan, terkait hal-hal penting menyangkut kelangsungan hidup masyarakat desa. Dukun memiliki posisi khusus dalam kebudayaan masyarakat di Pulau Bangka, dan bertugas menjamin segala pengetahuan atau kearifan yang berkaitan dengan lingkungan diterapkan atau dianut oleh masyarakat secara turun temurun. Secara keseluruhan, ritual di bukit-bukit sakral memiliki makna yang sama, yaitu sebagai bentuk rasa syukur atas hasil alam yang telah diperoleh. Ritual juga mengandung banyak nilai edukasi, pendidikan, hingga cara hidup yang bijaksana dengan sesama manusia dan alam. Penerapan peran dukun serta nilai-nilai dalam ritual penting untuk menghadapi berbagai persoalan lingkungan saat ini. Melalui ritual, masyarakat diingatkan akan ketergantungan mereka pada alam dan tanggung jawab untuk menjaganya.

**Kata Kunci:** Dukun, Ritual, Kearifan Lokal

## INTRODUCTION

Shamans have a unique role in the social system of society, especially in Indonesia. Many appreciate their knowledge, but quite a few have a negative view of shamans (Sartini, 2014). In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, a shaman is defined as a person who has the ability to treat, help sick people, and cast spells (spells, black magic, etc.). Meanwhile, in the Oxford English Dictionary, a shaman or dukun is a person who is respected and has extraordinary abilities to influence and motivate someone to do good (Nurdin, 2015). In the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) perspective, shamans have the potential to become centers of traditional ecological knowledge because of the various knowledge they possess. TEK is 'a cumulative body of knowledge, practices and beliefs, developed through adaptive processes and passed down from generation to generation through cultural transmission, about the relationships of living things (including humans) with each other and with their environment' (Robbins & Berkes, 2000). In a social-ecological perspective, a shaman is a guardian of sacred territory and is tasked with carrying out rituals as a form of consultation or appeasing spirits. Rituals support the maintenance of relationships and the potential of sacred areas, so they are useful as instruments for managing natural resources, especially in community sacred areas (Sinthumule et al., 2021). Apart from their role in leading rituals, shamans are also tasked with maintaining various 'taboos' or 'taboos' and customary laws, which play an important role in preserving and managing sacred areas (Negi, 2017; Roba, 2019). This includes various strict rules regarding fishing, hunting or cutting down trees, which if prohibited can cause disease, natural disasters or other disasters (Coggins & Hutchinson, 2006; Negi, 2017).

Referring to the 2021 Bangka Belitung Islands Province Regional Environmental Management Performance Information Document, throughout 2015-2020, 38,330 hectares of forest cover was lost on the Bangka Belitung Islands, which has a land area of around 1.6 million hectares. Currently, the remaining forests on Bangka Island are in the form of sacred hills and are often used as locations for rituals led by shamans. As one of the TEK products, rituals are more than just religious practices, but also a means of fostering environmental awareness and preserving local heritage through symbols that instill appreciation for nature and cultural diversity (Gole & Sudhiarsa, 2024). Furthermore, rituals have mobilized communities throughout the world to protect sacred forest landscapes which are ritual points (Geng YanFei et al., 2017; Hou, 2016).

This research aims to explore the role of shamans and local wisdom values in their rituals in protecting the remaining forests on Bangka Island. This research is important because local wisdom is a way of thinking and a way to preserve nature in local communities. The ecological values and local wisdom contained in the rituals on the sacred hills on Bangka Island can encourage awareness of the ecological crisis currently being experienced by the Bangka Belitung Islands Province (Erwana et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Syari & Nugraha, 2022). According to Althien John Pesurnay, local wisdom is very important to study and develop because local wisdom is in the hearts of the people and becomes the concept of people's thinking (Pesurnay, 2018). Local wisdom, with its knowledge, customary norms and cultural values, is an important legacy for communities to adapt and manage natural resources wisely.

A number of studies related to the role of shamans in the social realm have been conducted (Daud, 2016). In this research, Daud examined the social modes possessed by shamans, and how these have a social role in society. This role includes guidelines for behavior, social power, social control and collective behavior, which cannot be separated from the prevailing values and norms. Meanwhile, other research focuses on the role of shamans in traditional medicine (Nabila, 2020; Syahrani & Asrina, 2022). The role of the shaman has also been researched in the social structure of the Tengger tribe community, where the shaman has a very important position, role and function in the religious context of the Tengger community. Pandita shamans act as traditional and religious leaders whose function is to maintain traditional values. This research is different from these studies because it will focus on the relationship between shamans and the rituals they lead with the community. Apart from that, the research locus is also different and more comprehensive by taking locus on four sacred hills around Bangka Island.

In the concept of systems theory (Pesurnay, 2018) there are two important categories in the study of local wisdom, namely social relations between humans and the relationship between humans and nature. According to him, human social relations take the form of social structures that shape everyday social practices. Human social interaction is not only aimed at establishing relationships, but also at achieving mutual understanding and truth. Moral and aesthetic values that are believed to be good are formed through social interactions and relationships in society. Local wisdom, for example, shows how social interaction produces understanding and values that are beneficial for life together. Meanwhile, the relationship between humans and nature includes the position of nature which is utilized and managed by humans for their survival and welfare.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used descriptive qualitative method. The research subject is the role of shamans and values in rituals on sacred hills on Bangka Island. The location of this research focuses on four groups of indigenous people who live or are connected to the sacred hills on Bangka Island, namely the Jerieng Tribe who live around the foot of the Pelangas hills, Pelangas Village, West Bangka Regency. The Maras tribe lives around the foot of Mount Maras, Berbura Village, Bangka Regency. The people of Teru Village who live at the foot of the Mangkol hill, Central Bangka Regency. Lastly, the people of Gudang Village who live around the foothills of Granny Hill, South Bangka Regency. Data collection techniques include observation, in-depth interviews and searching for secondary materials related to the research topic. For the record, to illustrate the various values in the ritual, the observation process was only carried out at the 'Taber Gunung' ritual in Pelangas Village. Informants were determined purposively and snowballed to explore information that was felt to be lacking during the research process. Informants include shamans or traditional leaders in each research location. The qualitative data was then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach or better known as the qualitative descriptive analysis approach method (Branen, 2005).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Role of the Shaman**

Based on interviews with a number of key informants, there are at least 46 shamans spread across rural areas on Bangka Island. Shamans have an important role in the culture of village communities. They are seen as figures, and are often asked for their opinions and considerations regarding important matters concerning the survival of the village community. Apart from that, shamans are considered to have a number of advantages over ordinary people, such as healing abilities, supernatural abilities, and so on. This ability then strengthens the role of the shaman, so that he gets a special position in the community's social system. This is illustrated in the figure of Janum bin Lamat, one of the key informants who lives in Pelangas Village. Janum bin Lamat is the seventh descendant of "batin gunung". A leader in the Jerieng tribe's traditional system. Batin acts like a village shaman, who has the ability to heal, as well as being a liaison and keeper of balance between humans, nature and other creatures. According to Janum, the village shaman's job is not only to look after humans, but also other living creatures, including animals and plants. In other words, the duties of a shaman are not only in the context of relationships between humans but also humans and nature which are important components of local wisdom (Pesurnay, 2018).

In the context of rituals, shamans have an important role in determining the time of the ritual, leading, carrying it out, and ensuring that all rules or taboos are obeyed and implemented by the community. Even if someone violates it, the shaman will intervene to resolve it. The ritual carried out by the Jerieng Tribe in Pelangas Village is 'Taber Gunung' which is carried out once a year. This ritual is intended as a form of gratitude for the harvest, keeping it away from disaster or calamity (disease, crop failure, etc.). The time for carrying out the ritual is usually when the month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar has entered. However, the exact day of implementation must wait for the shaman's decision. If there are no instructions from the

shaman, or the ritual cannot be carried out. Determining the day for the ritual is related to the momentum of a good day. Usually this sign of a good day is obtained by shamans through dreams. Determining auspicious days does not only apply to rituals, but also relates to the timing of private events, such as circumcisions and weddings. This is because shamans. This is because shamans are figures who are respected by society and are also sacred figures. Therefore, shamans must always avoid bad behavior and behavior that deviates from applicable customs. Local wisdom as a guide for human behavior in living in harmony with nature and each other, is embedded in cultural values and is not an inanimate object (Abas et al., 2022) . In this case, shamans play an important role in maintaining community behavior guidelines towards the forest.

**Figure 1. Janum bin Lamat, Dukun yang Berperan Penting Dalam menjaga nilai-nilai budaya di masyarakat**



*Source: Data Primer, 2022.*

In a prohibited area, in this case a hill, a shaman, as shown in Figure 1, is tasked with maintaining a number of rules or ethics for activities around the forest. These rules include prohibitions against opening gardens in prohibited areas, whistling, saying dirty words, and even committing immoral acts. Every activity that uses non-timber forest products must first ask permission from a shaman. Based on the results of interviews with informants, violations of this rule can be fatal, ranging from possession, disease, to death. In some cases, the healing process for violations of this rule must also be carried out by shamans in the area. According to Janum, before it was carried out again in 2022, the Taber Gunung ritual on Penyabung Hill, Pelangas Village, had been in hiatus for approximately three decades. Around 2016, the ritual was carried out again by the Jerieng Malay Traditional Institute (LAM). However, it is not in accordance with Jerieng customs, because many parts of the ritual have changed, such as the original location on the hill, being moved to the traditional house. So this ritual is not considered or recognized by the village shamans. As long as the ritual is not carried out, many disasters befall the people of the Jerieng tribe. Like rice attacked by pests, durian did not bear fruit, honey yields decreased, and the peak occurred during a mass possession during a West Bangka Regency Government (District Government) event in Berang Village.

Meanwhile in Bukit Granny, South Bangka Regency, Makmun is a shaman figure who is also respected by the community. Similar to the Jerieng Tribe, on Granny Hill there is also the 'Ketupat Gong' ritual. Shamans play an important role in ensuring community participation in ritual events. Every resident is required to donate a bunch of diamonds to be taken to the top of



Granny Hill. If someone does not donate, the village shaman never forces them, but the consequences, such as disasters, crop failure, disease, etc., must be borne by themselves. Granny Hill is also considered a 'magic village', namely a village that is not visible to the human eye. So, the residents of Gudang Village are obliged by the shamans to live in harmony with the residents of the village. According to the results of an interview with Makmun, to this day residents still adhere to the advice of the village shamans, because there is a lot of evidence that those who violate them usually get sick and even disappear on Granny Hill because they behave rudely.

**Figure 2. The Loss of the Role of Shamans Affects Community Efforts to Destroy Nature**



*Source: Data Primer, 2022.*

Humans, through their lives, give birth to social systems, language, consciousness and culture as a result of their thought processes. This thought process has always been an integral part of life. Autopoiesis, the basic property of explaining the character of life, is at the heart of social systems theory. This theory emphasizes communication as a central element in human social interaction. Communication, as a special, autopoietic mode of reproduction, is produced and reproduced within social networks. This iterative process produces a system of beliefs, values, and norms that depend on communication for continuity (Baraldi & Corsi, 2017). In the Bukit Mangkol and Gunung Maras areas, the breakdown in communication between shamans and the community has resulted in the loss of the role of shamans in instilling cultural values in behaving with nature. The role of the shaman is lost due to the local community's rejection or negative view of the shaman and the rituals that take place. According to the informant, this has led to the rise of illegal logging activities, to mining activities such as what occurred in Mangkol Hill, and is clearly seen in Figure 2. According to Mang Kalu, one of the descendants of the shaman in Teru Village, said that the role of shamans in Teru Village has disappeared due to their absence. the younger generation who want to continue the title of shaman. This then had an impact on weakening the implementation of taboos and taboos around Mangkol Hill. A similar thing was also experienced by shamans in Berbura Village who used to perform rituals on Mount Maras, the highest peak on Bangka Island (Baraldi & Corsi, 2017).

### **Rituals as Expressions of Local Wisdom**

Rituals are part of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) which plays an important role in preserving forest areas throughout the world. The method of sacralizing forests through various rituals led by shamans or traditional leaders, has been recognized as an incentive for local communities to conserve forests and biodiversity (Geng YanFei et al., 2017; Sinthumule &

Mashau, 2020). Based on the results of interviews with a number of key informants, the rituals carried out on the sacred hill at the research location have a similar meaning, namely as a form of gratitude for natural products, as well as prayers to avoid all kinds of disasters, such as disease, pests, and so on. The implementation of the ritual which is routinely carried out every year also plays an important role in community participation in preserving the sacred hills as the remaining forest on Bangka Island.

During the research, observations were made by following a series of 'Taber Gunung' rituals by the Jerieng Tribe in Pelangas Village, Bangka Regency. Many rituals reflect the values and social norms that are upheld and function as a tool to preserve ancestral traditions, cultural heritage, and have environmental education messages for the younger generation (Hou, 2016). This is also reflected in the series of Taber Gunung rituals carried out on Penyabung Hill, one of the hills that is sacred to the Jerieng tribe community. The night before the ritual, people in Pelangas Village donated food from their homes which was then taken to Janum bin Lamat's house, the starting point for the community gathering. Inside the shaman's house, people gather to enjoy the food they have brought, while others help prepare the food that will be taken down to Penyabung Hill the next day.

**Figure 3. The Dambus Music Event is Held the Night Before the Ritual Takes Place**



*Source: Data Primer, 2022.*

All preparations for the event that night were carried out in mutual cooperation by the community. Including inviting the dambus group to fill the evening entertainment program. All the people danced along with the typical dambus music (Figure 1). At exactly midnight, the music stopped. Janum, as the shaman and ritual leader, went up to the stage to announce that the event would continue with the 'Mandi Gong' session. In this session, the shaman takes out a gold-colored gong and then bathes him in water mixed with seven types of flowers. The water that had been recited was then sprinkled around Janum's house, then distributed to the people present. This water is believed to bring blessings, therefore it is a hot topic for residents. After that, Janum hit the gong. The beating of the gong is intended to invite the community, even the ancestors of the Jerieng Tribe, to attend the ritual. This moment is a symbol of friendship for all the Jerieng people, both those who are still alive and those who have died

The next day, the main event began. The community, led by a shaman, walked together towards Penyabung Hill, the main location for the 'Taber Gunung' ritual. The choice of Penyabung Hill as a ritual site as a natural tourist attraction symbolizes the integral role of nature in this event. Participants also brought offerings in the form of various foods and plants as



a sign of respect for nature and life-supporting resources as a form of gratitude for the natural products given by God. On the way, Janum made a pilgrimage to a number of tombs inside the previous mountain. This is a form of respect for their leaders in the past who have brought blessings to the lives of the Jerieng Tribe people. The beating of gongs and drums again accompanied the Jerieng Tribe's journey to Penyabung Hill. Before entering the ritual area, people taking part are required to remove their footwear. According to Janum, this is a form of respect for nature. Humans must be one with nature, as explained by local wisdom as a form of human ethics or norms in relating to nature (Pesurnay, 2018). While waiting for the peak ritual to take place at noon, the people who took part made symbols for the livelihood of the Jerieng tribe. This symbol takes the form of a garden hut building, fish charts, rice plants, and so on. These symbols are made with twigs or leaves stuck into the ground. Then, the community performs a play on various products from their garden with each other. This activity is not only participated by parents, but also young people.

**Figure 4. Children also participate in the activity of making miniature gardens during the ritual. This has educational value in the ritual procession.**



*Source: Data Primer, 2022.*

In Figure 4, it can be seen that the activity of making miniature garden huts or gardens was participated in by generations, from the elderly to the children. According to Janum, this is intended as a symbol that the Jerieng Tribe people should not abandon gardening, rice planting or other livelihood activities which have been instrumental in providing a livelihood for the Jerieng Tribe. The presence of the younger generation also provides an environmental education message about the importance of preserving the tradition of planting rice or gardening from generation to generation. This is in line with educational silver in a cultural context which is an important element and the reason why this ritual must be maintained (Zeyer & Kelsey, 2013).

**Figure 5. The peak event of the ritual is where the Shaman recites a number of prayers and hands over the natural products back to nature.**



*Source: Data Primer, 2022.*

At the peak event (Figure), offerings in the form of yellow rice, sticky rice, ketupat, and chicken, are served in a container made of wood that is stuck in the ground. According to Janum, this offering is a symbol of the Jerieng Tribe's gratitude for natural products. All the food served is from community gardens, and this is a symbol of returning natural products to nature itself. According to Janum, this gives a message that people should always share with each other and nature itself. You should not be greedy in managing natural products, because without nature the people of the Jerieng tribe could not survive today. Moving on to the ritual session, Janum, accompanied by other traditional figures, stood upright facing the offerings. Several sentences mean hope and prayer, spoken in Jerieng. In essence, according to Janum, he as a shaman acts as an intermediary to communicate with living creatures in nature, be they plants, animals or the supernatural. But basically, everything is intended in the name of the Creator. This communication process aims to ensure that nature provides more abundant income to the Jerieng Tribe, and helps protect the Jerieng Tribe from all kinds of disasters. The ritual ends with prayer, followed by sowing rice, turmeric, jasmine flowers and honey around the location. Next, a pencak silat performance, accompanied by long drums and gongs, was held. After the event, the residents went home.

In picture 5 below, on the way home, people bring a number of medicinal plants. For them, the plants taken during the ritual have a more effective effect. The Jerieng tribe is recorded as having rich knowledge regarding medicinal plants. There are 82 types of plants from 52 families that the Jerieng Tribe uses as medicinal plants. Its properties are to cure 45 types of diseases, such as fever, diabetes, malaria and uterine cancer. The type of plant that is most widely used is Zingiberaceae with 7 types (9 percent), the habitus for medicine is trees (35 percent), the most common habitat is home gardens (52 percent), and the part of the plant most used is leaves (46 percent). The most common processing method is boiling (Novalia et al., 2018).



**Figure 6. People bring medicinal plants after the ritual.**



*Source: Data Primer, 2022.*

Through a series of Taber Gunung rituals by the Jerieng Tribe, it is illustrated how local wisdom is the basis of life for the Jerieng Tribe people, this includes a wise way of life, the right way of life, which is expressed through traditional rituals (Pesurnay, 2018). Rituals are not only a cultural and spiritual manifestation, but also a vital tool for preserving the environment and nature (Ardoin & Heimlich, 2021). In various parts of the world, indigenous peoples have developed special rituals that emphasize the importance of maintaining ecosystem balance as an integral part of their lives. These rituals are not just traditions passed down from generation to generation, but contain noble values about the relationship between humans and nature (Sulaeman et al., 2021). Through rituals, people are reminded of their dependence on nature and their responsibility to protect it. The understanding and respect for nature that is embedded through these rituals becomes a strong bulwark against exploitation and environmental damage. Thus, rituals not only enrich culture and spirituality, but also play an important role in preserving nature and ensuring the sustainability of human life in the future (Ardoin & Heimlich, 2021; Hariyanto, 2017). Finally, rituals led by shamans are a form of cultural expression, a reminder of identity, guardians of local wisdom, and the key to environmental sustainability (Prasetyo, 2023).

## **CONCLUSION**

Shamans are important figures in maintaining relationships between humans and humans with nature. The knowledge and various skills they possess make shamans have a special position in society. The implementation of a number of rules, values, and norms of human relations with nature depend on the presence of shamans in a community environment. The existence of shamans ensures that all knowledge or wisdom related to the environment is applied or adhered to by the community for generations. Without a shaman, the possibility of losing various knowledge and wisdom in maintaining natural balance is greater. Human ethics or morals to live in harmony with nature are very much needed by human civilization today. Through this research, it is important to restore the role of shamans, knowledge and rituals in the socio-cultural environment of rural communities, in order to support government conservation efforts which have so far not been effective in reducing the rate of forest degradation on Bangka Island. As is the meaning of the ritual led by the shaman, it is a form of expression of the integrity of the local wisdom of the community, both in terms of a wise way of life, a correct way of life, as well as a form of gratitude for the abundant natural products.

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