

**A STUDY OF WETU TELU SYNCRETISM IN LOMBOK:
A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

Wetu Telu is a syncretism of belief prevalent in *West Lombok* region. Danghyang Dwijendra from *Daha* in East Java region is regarded as the founder of the *Watu Telu* cult. He came to the Island of Lombok to teach enlightenment. One of the *Ashram* where he developed Hindu teaching and religion was *Suranadi*, a beautiful holy place. That *Ashram* was encircled by holy water, which currently can still be used by the Hindu devotees in performing their sacred sacrifice (*yajnya*). This study is aimed at knowing social and religious aspects of *Wetu Telu* as cultural heritage. The data is obtained through literature review and in-depth interview with public figures. From the data analysis, it is obtained that the history and social background of the *Sasak* people who inhabit the island is a mix of ethnic groups and culture. With this background, *Wetu Telu* which is also the syncretism of Hindu, Buddha, Islam, and local culture has a composite nature by taking only important matters without leaving its original teaching. *Wetu Telu* is considered to be Lombok Hindu teaching; and *Wetu Telu* is as inseparable part of holy pilgrimage (*dharma yatra*) of Danghyang Nirartha to Lombok in giving enlightenment and spiritual happiness to the people of Lombok. With the existence of *Wetu Telu*, a new culture and identity is built. The interaction amongst different culture, religion, and ancestral custom stimulates the emergence of a new culture as a part of diffusion process, acculturation, and cultural adaptation in literature, art, as well as theology.

KEYWORDS: *Ancient Hindu Civilization and Wetu Telu Syncretism*

INTRODUCTION

Lombok is a small island amongst those islands composing Indonesian archipelago. It politically belongs to West Nusa Tenggara Province. The term “*lombok*” is found in *Nagara Krtagama* prose text composed by Prapanca, a great poet of the XIV century East Java, in 1365 AD. In the canto XIV started from 3 to 4 of the text it is stated that West Lombok is called *Lombok Mirah*, whereas, the area of East Lombok is called *Sasak*. In the course of history, *Sasak* denotes its people and culture. In a chronicle of this island as mentioned in *Babad Lombok* it is mentioned that in

ancient times there was a king named Lombok who ruled over the island of Lombok (Abdul, 2006: 13). Most people believe that the word '*Lombok*' is derived from the word '*loubouk*' in *Sasak* local language, which in English means 'straight'. According to most people, the character of Lombok people is straight hearted (*loubouk*), honest, follows ethics, good manners, and virtuous noble character.

In the course of history, migration of people from neighbouring islands could not be avoided. Ethnic group came and brought own culture and identity. The relations of the *Sasak* people with other ethnic groups from outside caused the existence of mixing culture that accentuates and enriches the culture of the region. Such a relationship has been fostered with other tribes such as Java, Bali, Makasar, and others. The tradition and cultural entity brought by other ethnic groups strongly influenced the Lombok people's way of life. This mixed cultural existence can still be witnessed until the present time which has enriched the cultural heritage of Lombok Island.

According to Goris (in Zaelani, 2007: 38), the word *Sasak* comes from the Sanskrit '*Sahsaka*'. '*Sah*' means to leave, while '*Saka*' means origin or residence. So *Sahsaka* means to leave the land of origin and to gather somewhere. In general, most of the ancestors of the *Sasak* or Lombok people from Java and parts of Bali, Arab, and Chinese moved away from their home regions and wanted to go, live, and settle in Lombok. Fertile land and good climate perhaps are attracting features of this island. Other ethnic groups who live on the island of Lombok are ethnics of Balinese, Sumbawa, Arabian Javanese, and Chinese immigrants (Budiwanti, 2000: 6). The *Sasak* tribe is predominantly *Muslim*, while Javanese and Balinese are Hindu, and Chinese are generally Christian. Thus, the Lombok *Sasak* tribe is a social unity unlike the other because of cultural differences with other tribes in Indonesia. Thus, the civilization of the *sasak* of Lombok is composite in nature. Similarly, syncretism of belief and culture happened in composing *Wetu Telu* cult in Lombok.

Owing to this fact, it is interesting to know the existence and its social and cultural impacts of *Wetu Telu* as a religious belief professed by a number of local people of Lombok. A study from social life and religion is worth to be undertaken to throw some lights on the matter.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is a qualitative method, whereas the data collection techniques were accomplished through in-depth interview techniques and observing documents and sites or

places connected with the sacred travel (*dharmayatra*) of the holy *Danghyang Dwijendra* or *Danghyang Nirartha* in Lombok. Holy places are still used by Hindus when performing any of the five sacred sacrifices (*Panca Maha Yadnya*) activity. In addition to data gathered from text and field study, living tradition preserving the *Wetu Telu* tradition are also used as important source of information. The data gathered are classified and interpreted in a holistic approach. Finally the data interpreted are concluded.

DISCUSSION

The belief of the ancestors of ancient Lombok people initially had a flow of beliefs namely animism, dynamism, and totemism. This animistic belief cannot be separated from the ancient history of the Indonesian nation in worshipping spirit which is considered had magical and supernatural powers. It is evident that the *Sasak* ancestors believed in the existence of spirit and that the spirit was the principle tenet of religious belief arising from a primitive human. The ideology of dynamism is still practised by the Lombok tribe of *Sasak* till now, the worship of the deceased ancestral spirits which is shown in the offerings in the graves of the ancestors in the hope of asking for help or prayer of blessing in order to obtain salvation and well-being. While the belief in the totemism of *Sasak* Lombok society is a notion that believes humans have a family relationship with other beings such as animals, so it needs to be preserved considering the animal to have unseen power and need to be sacred or sanctified.

Majority of Lombok people are now Muslim, but in daily life some of them practise the teachings of syncretism (called *Wetu Telu* cult), a mixing up traditions of Hindu and the practice of worshipping to the ancestral spirits, various spiritual deities and others. In everyday life, they tend to ignore Islamic practices that are routinely considered obligatory by pure Muslims (practising five times of prayers a day). For Lombok people, adherents of *Wetu Telu* indigenous *Sasak* tribe play more dominant roles, while some other things related to religious practices always contradicted to the concept of pure Islam. Although they are aware of certain customary rules, such as paying homage to ancestors in the cemetery and worshipping spirits, it is clearly contrary to the teachings of Islam. For *Wetu Telu* of *Sasak* tribe is rightly kept as part of their religious tradition. The people of Lombok practising *Wetu Telu* do not outline a clear boundary between tradition and religion because the custom is always united with local religious activities (Budiwanti, 2000: 8).

Danghyang Dwijendra Journey and *Wetu Telu* Syncretism

Danghyang Dwijendra came to Lombok from Daha of East Java. He was a devout follower of Shaivism. However, formerly he was a Buddhist. *Danghyang Dwijendra* had already received a respect and honour even when there were spread of Islam in Java. In addition to his understanding of the teachings of Shiva-Buddha cult, he understands the teachings of Sufi of Islam. Once upon a time, while on the northern coast of Java, he was in contact with the guardians there who performing mission of spreading Islam in Gresik. He met the guardians of Gresik as the distance between Daha and Gresik was very close. In decline period of Majapahit Kingdom, *Danghyang Dwijendra* along with his family crossed the Strait of Bali and travelled around Bali, Lombok, and Sumbawa.

Danghyang Dwijendra's arrival in Bali Island was welcomed by King of Gelgel, the ruler. In 1520 King of Gelgel's messenger from Klungkung Bali failed to conquer the kingdom of Lombok. Furthermore, in 1530 AD in the second arrival of *Danghyang Dwijendra* has brought a new understanding of animism, Hindu, and Islamic syncretism in Lombok. With the presence, *Danghyang Dwijendra* has influenced some religious leaders of Islam on the island of Lombok (Lukman, 2008: 18). His presence was significantly beneficial to the development of Hinduism in Bali and Lombok Islands.

Danghyang Dwijendra's trip to Lombok aimed to secure the island of Lombok and Sumbawa. At first, he travelled to Lombok to deliver religious missions; and after completion then he continued his journey to the next island of Sumbawa (Manuaba, 1996: 21). The arrival of *Danghyang Dwijendra* to Lombok was to convey the teachings of religion as a foundation to direct the people of Lombok to live calmer and more comfortable. This is in accordance with the statement of C. Kluckhohn (cited in Soerjono Soekanto, 1999) that religion (belief) is one of the most important cultural elements that can lead humans in the life of society.

On the way to travel in Lombok Island, firstly *Danghyang Dwijendra* arrived at Batu Bolong in Senggigi of West Lombok beach. After that he continued the journey through Dasan Agung area, Karang Medahin then towards Suranadi (wilderness area). At the time of his coming, the Lombok people experienced a religious transition from a genuine belief to a Hindu belief. One of his beliefs is to purify water as an object that gives fertility and prosperity, hence the existence of the water spots was preserved, which until now the region is called Suranadi. With water trust as something purified giving fertility and prosperity, *Danghyang Dwijendra* decided to

stay and settle in the Suranadi region. With the incident, *Sasak* Lombok people are expected to support the community, as well as help, make *ashram* (traditional school) as a place of spiritual learning. In the *ashram* activities disciples were given ways or procedures of farming, eradicating pests, and diseases, and treatment (Arcana, 2009: 11).

In the text of *Dwijendra Tattwa* it is explained that *Danghyang Dwijendra* taught *Wetu Telu* to the people of Lombok. Due to this fact, he was considered as a spiritual master. For the *ashram*, where he teaches religion, it was given the name Suranadi, which is a very beautiful *ashram* flanked by two ponds filled with fragrant flower trees. Due to his strength and spiritual power, the margins of *ashram* sprang up several springs of holy water named by *Pethirtan*, *Tirtha Pelukatan*, *Tirta Pebersihan*, *Tirta Pengentas*, and *Toya Tabah*. Furthermore, *Danghyang Dwijendra* provides the function of each spring as a means function in completing religious ceremonies (Sugriwa, 1990: 4).

After learning about the characteristics of the Lombok community, *Danghyang Dwijendra* teaches religious teachings that are collaborated with the values of original beliefs, Sufism of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The teaching then became known as *Wetu Telu*, a living tradition in Lombok. Then *Danghyang Dwijendra* provides spiritual guidance and worldly knowledge for a year. The same thing in line with Koentjaraningrat's statement (Wiranata, 2002) explains that belief (religion) is one of the most difficult elements to interpret, and even takes a long time and always happens throughout the development of human history. With guidance of *Danghyang Dwijendra*, finally *Wetu Telu* cult developed quite well, covering the area of West Lombok, North Lombok, and Central Lombok. Due to his role in this regards, his name is known as Prince Sangupati or the reformer.

Sugriwa (1990: 44) mentions that the people of Lombok, although have different schools of belief, they always live in harmony through inner purification. *Danghyang Dwijendra* always teaches the highest purpose of life that is union with the highest reality known as *Hyang Widhi Wasa* or Allah in Islam. The difference happened is only the implementation and language expressions. In actual aim of practising this cult for Lombok people is to live in harmonious, peaceful, safe, and peaceful way. For that, it is required peace of mind and steadfast to face the suffering and challenges of life like and sorrows or sufferings. Similarly, *Danghyang Dwijendra's* message when communicating language to people was always followed by an inner language, causing others to be happy, calm, and happy.

In its development, the presence of *Danghyang Dwijendra* to Lombok had motivation that the beliefs of Lombok people have similarity with the teachings of Hinduism in Bali, so it takes the closeness of the belief to avoid social tension in implementing religious teachings among ethnic groups. This is proven after *Danghyang Dwijendra* influenced Lombok society with the teaching, the social conditions of Lombok and Bali was safe. Although without accompany of troops and weapons, he has created security and tranquillity in the people of Lombok. This is in accordance with the theory of motivation that describes the desire of a person's behaviour or a group of people to push or pull toward a certain goal that is conducive and fun. This intrinsic motivation occurs when *Danghyang Dwijendra* was able to practice Hinduism with the social conditions of conducive conditions.

As a *Siwa-Budha* priest, *Danghyang Dwijendra* imparted religious teachings with an persuasive approach so that there was acculturation of understanding and implementation of religious teachings that prioritize in human values. This result was that Hindu and Muslim interactions in Lombok live in harmonious way and respect each other. In the theory of acculturation it provides a solution to the entry of foreign culture into certain cultural areas. The same is true of acculturation theory (Ningrat, 2004, p. 24), which explains that the behaviour of religious life has a form of religious coherence that interacts between two or more local cultures; and ultimately embodies a form of acculturation. This syncretism teaching caused the Lombok people accept and be able to understand the new concept based on the principle of balance, better known as *Tri Hita Karana* then perhaps gave a birth to the concept of *Wetu Telu*.

Sacred Places and Settlements of Hindu Community in Lombok

In the early 18th century AD, Lombok was conquered by the Gelgel kingdom of Klungkung in Bali. This is evident from some relics of *Hindu* Bali that a number of Balinese Hindu communities that inhabited and settled in some areas around Mataram City and West Lombok Regency. Some temples built as places of worship and unity of Hindus found in this area, such as Mayura, Meru, Narmada, Lingsar, Gunung Agung (Gunung Sari), Batu Bolong, and Suranadi. These people stayed and interacted with indigenous people preserving their tradition and culture.

In addition to the similarity/resemblance of Balinese cultural tradition with Lombok, there are also similar names of location of the residential area of the Hindu Bali community in Lombok, especially in the city of Mataram. The residences of the Hindu community were occu-

pied by followers of King Karangasem when coming to Lombok. They remained there in some areas such as *Karang Batuaya*, *Karang Batudawa*, *Karang Baturinggit*, *Karang Sidemen*, *Karang Manggis*, *Karang Seraya*, *Karang Kubu*, *Karang Jeruk Manis*, *Karang Culik*, *Karang Perasi*, *Karang Kecicang*, *Karang Jasi*, *Karang Sampalan* (Klungkung Regency), *Karang Buleleng* and *Karang Bungkulun* (Buleleng Regency). In addition to these places, there are settled places of the Hindu communities in Lombok, such as *Saren*, *Sukadana*, *Jasri*, *Seraya*, *Tumbu* and others.

Literature and Art of Hindu Society in Lombok

Given the origin of Hindu Lombok society originating from Java and Bali, then the language and writing traditions have some commonalities. This is not a part of power of King Majapahit and Karangasem of Bali who ruled in Lombok. Bali's influence on Lombok culture occurred when the expansion of the kingdom of Karangasem to Lombok, resulting in cultural acculturation between local culture and the culture of the immigrants. Similarly, the *Sasak* language, especially the script (written language) is very close to the Javanese and Balinese script, which is similar to the Balinese script (*Ha, Na, Ca, Ra, Ka* alphabet) whose pronunciation is very close to Bali. In addition to it, there is a communicating language used by the *Sasak* Lombok community in various official events or rituals such as weddings, cemetery and grave pilgrimage events, and thanks giving events. This proves that the influence of Bali is quite strong in the development of literature of *Sasak*.

In addition to it, in the field of arts that with the alternation of power on the island of Lombok and the influx of other cultural influences, these have brought rich and varied repertoire of Lombok cultures in arts. As a combination of forms in diffusion, acculturation, and enculturation of culture, form expressions of Lombok arts becomes very diverse with its own characteristics. The most perceived influence was acculturated with Balinese Hindu art that collaborated with Lombok's Islamic culture. Both have contributed greatly to the development of arts and culture in Lombok. Cultural Balinese influences on Lombok can be seen in the arts like *Cepung*, *Cupak Gerantang*, *Jangger Dance*, and *Gamelan Thokol*, whereas arts that have received Islamic influence are arts like *Rudad*, *Cilokaq*, *Wayang Sasak*, and *Gamelan Rebana*.

CONCLUSION

The existence of *Wetu Telu* cult in Lombok has a very strong cultural bound to the Lombok society nowadays. Therefore, the historical and cultural background of its existence is important to be

acknowledged. This study vividly revealed that the *Wetu Telu* cult which still exists in Lombok till nowadays is a variant of Hindu religion and composite in nature. It was pioneered by a sage coming from Daha in East Java named *Danghyang Dwijendra* who did spiritual travelling to Lombok as part of a noble duty as a saint to give enlighten to the people of Lombok. Through deep understanding and sincere practice of *Wetu Telu* cult the followers will be able to understand its form, identity, and practices as to lead life to be happy and peaceful.

The interaction of various ancestral cultures, religions, and customs originated from Java and Bali stimulated the emergence of a new culture as a part of diffusion, acculturation, and adaptation process in the fields of literature, art, and theology. The existence of ancestors of Hindu Javanese and Balinese who travelled in Lombok caused the existence of some Hindu settlement areas in Lombok along with temples of worship, such as Mayura, Meru, Narmada, Lingsar, Gunung Agung (Gunung Sari), Batu Bolong, and Pura Suranadi.

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