

Conference Paper

Nias Traditional Ceremonies in J. A. Sonjaya's Novel *Manusia Langit*

Purwarno, Andang Suhendi, and Azmir

Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Abstract

This research contains an analysis of Nias traditional ceremonies in the novel *Manusia Langit* by J.A. Sonjaya. To reveal the traditional ceremonies of Nias people depicted in the novel *Manusia Langit*, and see what the views were put to the author of the novel, the author uses the sociological approach of literature. Through a sociological approach of literature, it is seen that people of Nias in the novel have a high trust in ancestors, and the myths in society. The study is analyzed by using descriptive qualitative method. The theory used to analyse the data in this research is that of Sonjaya (2008). The findings show that Nias people can be observed from *Banuaha* public trust in ancestors and the origins of their ancestors. They also believe in in spirits, and adhere in the traditions and myths prevailing in society, as well as in the implementation of traditional ceremonies.

Keywords: *banuaha*, excavation, myth, traditional ceremony, ancestor, spirit

Corresponding Author:

Purwarno
 purwarno@sastra.uisu.ac.id

Received: 13 March 2018

Accepted: 10 April 2018

Published: 19 April 2018

Publishing services provided by
 Knowledge E

© Purwarno et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons](#)

[Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the AICLL Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Manusia Langit tells about the story of Nias traditional ceremonies. It tells about the first character named Mahendra, who went to Nias, North Sumatra and got a lot of explanation about the ceremony along with a wide range of requirements, ranging from ceremonies of birth, marriage and death, to the knowledge of the myths prevailing in society *Banuaha*.

Thematically, the novel is interesting because it tells about the traditional ceremonies associated with the culture of Nias. This novel is not just about the depiction of the culture of Nias, but is also peppered with stories of romance and mystical stories. Those are the two things that make the story in the novel interesting. The fact that up to now no one has to review and provide feedback on the depth constitutes one of the reasons why the writer feels interested to analyse the topic taken from the novel. Besides, it is also as an attempt to preserve the Nias Traditions so that they can still be seen or studied by the next generation.

 OPEN ACCESS

2. Literature Review

2.1. Nias history

The Nias islanders have cultural links with the Bataks on Sumatra, the Naga in India, Dayaks in Kalimantan and aboriginal groups in Taiwan. In the old days they practiced headhunting and fought wars between clans to secure heads for funerals and wedding doweries. Nias island was not brought under the control of the Dutch until the 1950s. Before that time many Nias were captured by the Aceh or traded with gold and became slaves. Christianity made great inroads among the Nias beginning in 1915 through apocalyptic conversions movements known as the Great Repentance that characterized traditional Nias beliefs as works of the devil (Paul Hockings: 1993: 221).

Recorded accounts of Nias Island date back to the period of trade by Baghdad merchants with India and China, by way of Southeast Asia. Suleyman in Viaro (2001: 150-171) first wrote about the island and described it "to contain an abundance of gold. The inhabitants live off the fruit of the coconut tree, from which they make palm wine, and cover their bodies with coconut oil. When someone wants to get married, he must bring the head of an enemy. If he has killed two enemies, he may take two wives. If he has killed fifty enemies, he may take fifty wives." Other early accounts of Nias Island include: *The Book of Indian Wonders (Kitab adaib al-Hind)*, dated by Van der Lith to the year 950; the writings of the famous geographer Edrisi (1154); a description of cannibals inhabiting the island by Kazwini (1203-1283); accounts by Rasid Ad-Din (1310); and descriptions of a large island city by Ibn Al-Wardi (1340).

2.2. Nias ceremonies

Nias people believe that, in the sky there are nine levels of heaven and at the above levels, *Lowalangi* (God of Heaven) dwells. They also believe there are other nine levels under the earth controlled by *Latura* (God of Death).

Nias community held a ritual and ceremonial sacrifice of animals intended for *Lowalangi*. Offerings such as eggs, produce, wine, and water are intended for the ancestors and nature spirits. Other rituals or ceremonies are present at wedding celebrations, funerals or the funerals and feasts which were held by the nobility.

Nobility which is so called *Si'ulu* is entitled to the position of heredity. *Si'ulu* title must be passed through the celebration. Prior to the celebration of the requirement, a person cannot accept a new honorary title; only after conducting *owasa*, a person will be recognized as *Si'ulu*. In *owasa*, everyone is trying to "outdo each other", for

example the dignity will be lifted by the greater number of pigs supplied. The flesh will then be distributed to the public in the appropriate party rank and class, giving the meat also show respect to guests. Giving meat on holy *owasa* also contain elements for Nias people "consider themselves" as the pigs of the gods, so the sacrifice of pigs symbolize human sacrifice. With other words, the prestige of a person is not measured by the amount of accumulated wealth, but by its ability to accumulate wealth to be shared [11].

Another important element is the structuring and implementation. *Owasa* continues cooperation between the chiefs and villagers, nobles, and commoners whose support is needed to collect goods for the celebration.

The noble women are also able to finance their own celebration. Interestingly, a man would put gold jewelry for his wife first before himself as a courtesy to the wife's family. The common people are also allowed to hold a small celebration of the people. Of course, if they are quite prosperous, they are expected to do so.

However, they are not as entitled to wear jewelery as worn nobility and not allowed to often hold celebrations; also prohibited from having a party to raise the level to the position of royalty.

On the feast of this great salvation, the nobles sought to obtain the rights to join the ancestors. This is done by setting up a monument and memorial stone. Monuments in the form of a stone throne are called *osa-osa*, decorated by animal heads and stone building upright. Carved stone surface as a warning to the leaders is important.

Another kind of ceremony is *fondrakö*. *Fondrakö* is also documented in the literature Nias. Some sources say that the ceremony was held to clarify the customary law and also absolution for violations of the law that might have upset the balance of the universe. *Fondrakö* basically swore his oath on the formation of *ori* (a collection of villages) when the village head members gather to determine the exchange rates of various goods, standardization of weights and measures, as well as the setting of interest. *Fondrakö* confirms curse against anyone who violates the provision. It is said that the first *fondrakö* held by *Hia* known from *Gomo*, and whenever there are members of the village who broke away to build a new village, held *fondrakö* to reaffirm the rule; there is always a pig is sacrificed.

Violation of the rules of the ancestors are believed to punishment in the form of pain and misfortune; and the ceremony of absolution should be implemented in a way to make a sculpture contest *Horo* tall headdress wearing branched stems. Formerly the clergy should wear headgear of fork-shaped timber at the ceremony *fondrakö*.

The people of Nias are still celebrates various ceremonies and parties with dances, games and rituals soldiering. Among the most spectacular event is a war dance, a show

that is always present in each event Nias ceremony. Other ceremonies which sometimes happen traditionally are ceremony for respecting ancestors, for the head hunting as the means of revenge but it is not happened anymore, baby spirits eaters as the way of vanishing the burdenrns, for buiding a house or traditional house, appointing a new leader, welcoming guest, and many other things (Sonjaya. 2008: 97)

3. Research Method

To analyze the data, this research uses descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative research is commonly used to investigate research questions. The content analysis, inductive analysis, and logical analysis are mostly used in the analysis of qualitative material (Walford, 1991: 76), stating that descriptive research determines and reports the way the things are. This research shows the nature of the situation as it exists at the time of the study. That is why this research uses descriptive design. The data of this study belong to the non-manipulated variables as they are not the result of experiment.

As long as all the data collection is in the form of words, this research also uses qualitative research. The main instrument of this research is the researcher himself as the key-human-instrument. The object of this analysis is marital failure and some characters are involved in this marital failure and they are to be analyzed based on the phenomena of the situation. The role of qualitative approach in this study is to give a portrayal of characters' attitude to the belief systems of Nias People.

4. Discussion

4.1. Respecting for ancestors ceremony

At the beginning of *Manusia Langit*, J.A. Sonjaya directly illustrates that the people of Nias, which is *Banuaha* society, still believe in the existence and role of ancestral spirits in their lives. In the novel, the novelist also several times brings up a dialogue of the characters who call the ancestral people of Nias. The mention of ancestors by the people of Nias in the early stories is seen from the conversations that occur between Pak Nai Laiya with Sayani. Pak Nai Laiya is believed to have the power to summon up the ancestral spirits to come to his house so that if Mahendra wants to know the history of *Banuaha*, he can ask directly the ancestral spirit.

"This man told me, the matter will later permit them talking again with Mr. Mbowo Laiya. But, he said, if Bang Mahendra wants to know the history of

Banuaha, just come to his house. Pak Nai Laiya can invite his ancestral spirits. Bang Mahendra could talk with the spirits, including asking about the history of *Banuaha*. No need to bother digging, he said. (Sonjaya, 2010: 5).

Sayani is the son of Ama Budi, the indigenous leader of Mahendra in *Banuaha* society. As the son of an important person in the village, Sayani certainly understands how the customs rules and beliefs are prevailing in its environment. However, behind the obedience, as a young man who has been going to G. Sitoli, Nias which is more modern, he has started to pick the beliefs that may still be enforced or are not. In the excerpts of the conversation, there are other figures, namely the figure of Pak Nai Laiya. Pak Nai Laiya is a descendant of *Banuaha*. In the past, there was tension between the family of Sayani with Pak Nai Laiya. Therefore, until now, Pak Nai Laiya still bears a grudge, even they want to separate themselves from *Banuaha* and establish *banua* or other villages. The above quotation explained that Pak Nai Laiya believes that the ancestral spirits can be summoned through the ceremony and can help people who want to know the ancestral spirits trip. After the ancestral spirits are recalled, Mahendra will not have to bother to dig up and collect the data one by one.

The information that Pak Nai Laiya can summon up the ancestral spirit so that Mahendra can speak to the spirits make Mahendra confused. He wonders how the communication process can occur. This can be seen from the quotation "How can I communicate with ancestral spirits?" (Sonjaya, 2010: 5). How to communicate with the ancestral spirit as conveyed by Pak Nai Laiya through a sculpture really has made Mahendra confused.

"Pak Nai Laiya Said that Bang Mahendra could talk to the ancestors through ztua shoot, sculpture parents, at Pak Nai Laiya's home," Sayani translate. "The spirit of the great man could be called, but they must do the ceremony first." (Sonjaya, 2010: 6).

From the above quotation, it is seen that Pak Nai Laiya seems able to summon up the ancestral spirit. They trust and respect for ancestors. In addition, people also believe that the spirit has an important role in their lives. Trust and respect for ancestors are not only seen on the confidence in the community, but also supported by the establishment of some sculptures or stone heritage building of the Megalithic period. *Banuaha* public trust in ancestors along with their places of ancestor worship is related to public confidence of *Banuaha* about a decline in *Manusia Langit*. *Manusia Langit* which is described in the novel is the ancestor of the people of Nias. For the people of Nias, the area near the river flow *Gomo* is considered very sacred place because it is a drop in *Manusia Langit* to Earth.

4.2. Head hunting ceremony

Besides beliefs in ancestors applied in a certain ceremony and the origins of its people as descendants of *Manusia Langit*, Nias people depicted in the novel is the *Manusia Langit* society that keeps the tradition already. One tradition that many people do in Nias, especially the people of Nias in the past is the tradition of head hunting ceremony. In the novel, the depiction of the hunting ceremony, or be heading head, first appeared at the beginning of the story. After meeting with Pak Nai Laiya while excavating at a location near the river flow of Gomo, Sayani is warned not to come to the house of Pak Nai Laiya alone. Mahendra then surprised when Sayani said that Pak Nai Laiya often create problems with Ama Budi's family, especially the family of Mr. Nai Laiya who still has a grudge heads in debt.

Here is a quotation that shows an explanation of the tradition of hunting or decapitation ever happened to the ancient people of Nias.

"People they always do, Brother, always looking for trouble, especially with our family, always so "

"Why?"

"You know, brother, here like that, especially when they still oweat our heads. It's a matter of pride. "

"Chief of what?"

"The human head?"

"Once upon a time, cut off the head of their grandfather by our grandfather becausepeople they insult our grandmother". (Sonjaya, 2010: 7).

As seen in the above quotation, as an immigrant from outside of Nias, Mahendra is very surprised by the decapitation told by Sayani. It certainly looks strange and foreign to the people who are just a few moments to settle in Nias. The conversation indicates that in fact, among families with relatives of Ama Budi and Pak Nai Laiya, there was a dispute that was simply superb. This dispute raises a tradition that the next head of the debt must be paid to the head. Such depictions are seen that in solving the problem, the people of Nias first use of emotion and anger as a means of settlement.

4.3. Baby eaters spirit ceremony

In Nias society described by the author of the novel *Manusia Langit*, shows that people who trust the spirits is good in their lives. As a society that is still far from modern life,

people in Nias depicted in the novel *Manusia Langit* believe some evil spirits disrupt their lives. Two demons that appear in the sky is the human spirit and the baby eaters *tesafo* (spirits). Baby spirit eater was first raised in the early part of the story when Ama Budi first told him about his birth. At that time Ama Budi said that he was lucky to be born safely and not be eaten by spirits. Budi Ama explanation can be seen from the following quotations.

“Yes yes, I’m very lucky. In the old days a lot of babies born in missing fields in eating spirits,” said Ama Budi (Sonjaya, 2010: 19).

From these quotations, it seems that people believe that at that time many babies being eaten by baby-eating spirits are very lucky. This baby-eating spirits began to be known when the tribe *Belada* (Nias people who lived by hunting in the forest) still occupies Nias. According to the old people in Nias, the tribe was losing its population because many of their children were eaten by the baby-eating spirits, as seen in the following passage.

“Because of often missing eaten by spirits, Belada population ultimately is not much and not growing, even extinct. Children are frequently lost their babies eaten by evil spirits. The story was still alive until now. Many people still believe that we are now eating the baby’s spirit.” (Sonjaya, 2010: 20).

4.4. House building ceremony

In the novel depicted the Sky People that used to be, for the people of Nias, the house is valuable because it is not only set up for a place to stay. Establishment of houses for the people of Nias was used also to show the owner’s social status. In the establishment, a custom home should also follow some stages of the ceremony, as seen in the following passage.

“In addition to large logs that no longer exist in the forest, building a custom home is hard for us now. Should parties, ranging from preparing the wood, build, to inaugurate the house? Party costs far more than material for making houses, especially for the nobility like us. Established a custom house take many years because it must go through various stages of the ceremony (Sonjaya, 2010: 12).

Stages ceremony performed in the establishment of a custom home is later explained further by Sayani, as illustrated in the following quotation.

"In the past, while creating the foundation ceremony held beating gongs and drums to drive away the evil spirits in the land that will be built around the house. When the house was completed, before occupied, they should be held several times of ceremony, inviting dozens of men into the house to test the strength of the house with an animal-an animal dancing. After that they should be treated to food by slaughtering dozens of pigs." (Sonjaya, 2010: 13).

As mentioned before, the religious system adopted by the people of Nias demonstrated their confidence in the fine spirits. From the quotation above, it shows that the beating gongs and drums in the stage of the ceremony meant that people living in the house will be free from evil spirits disturbing. In addition, the slaughter of pigs can be seen as a means to show the prosperity of the owner of the house. *Manusia Langit* also mentioned that in ancient days, not just pigs were slaughtered, the head of a slave also sacrificed in the ceremony of the construction of custom homes. It is seen from the following quotation.

"In the past, the things slaughtered are not only pigs, but also a slave who was ousted from the rooftops that very high to fall down, and then slaughtered. Head of slaves was then deposited on top of pole home." (Sonjaya, 2010: 13).

Slaughter pig's head or slave head is conducted to demonstrate the dignity and position in society as well as homeowners in their positions in front of the ancestors. However, as already explained, the construction of custom homes are now not as complicated as it was because it was blocked by the facilities and the inclusion of religion in their lives. At the present time, people are not easily able to collect the recovered even hundreds of pigs to be sacrificed. This makes the terms of the construction of custom homes in *Banuaha* is now much easier. The depiction of the founding ceremony of the traditional houses depicted in *Manusia Langit* has differences with the stages of the establishment ceremony contained traditional house in Wiradnyana (2010: 127-128).

4.5. Appointing leader ceremony

In *Manusia Langit*, a character Ama Budi is described as one of the people who has important influences on *Banuaha*. Ama Budi gain a high position in society because of previous ceremonies or *mangowasa owasa*. *Owasa* or *mangowasa* party was done to reinforce the position of Ama Budi as a village head as well as the traditional elders in

Banuaha. Before doing *owasa* or *mangowasa*, Ama Budi has first swine-cutting ceremony as seen from the following quotation.

“That’s it,” said Ama Budi softly. “Family and relatives finally pushed me to make a party. I cut 30 pigs to confirm my status as head of the village. Still, my voice is not heard.” (Sonjaya, 2010: 101).

The above quotation shows that as the country that has established itself with a party or the inauguration ceremony as the village head, the position or status is still not appreciated by the public.

“Being the village head did not mean to make someone respected in the village; nonetheless cherished are those clan elders and customs,” Ama said Budi. “Not to mention the clan elders and traditional elders were many who envy me.” (Sonjaya, 2010: 101).

The clan elders and traditional elders much envy for Ama Budi to become a village head. Many of those who could not become a village head are those who he could not read. Ama Budi is successfully elected as village head in *Banuaha* because it meets the requirements that he can read and write from the government, as illustrated in the following passage.

“Because only I who can read and write,” said Ama Budi firmly. “There was a government, one of the requirements was the village head had to be literate. Because of that requirement, stout clan elders and customs can not be the head of the village.” (Sonjaya, 2010: 100).

As described previously, although becoming a village head, Ama Budi is still not fully respected by the people there. Ama Budi leads the village from 1982 to 1992. In the first three years as village head, he has still been not heard by the public. Therefore, after the third year as head of the village, Ama Budi then implemented the highest ceremonies or parties to form the traditional elders. Highest parties or ceremonies are eaten *owasa* or *mangowasa*.

References

- [1] Currie, Mark. (2007). *Narrative, Fiction, and the Philosophy of Time*. Edinburgh, Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press Ltd
- [2] Direktorat Jenderal Pemasaran Departemen Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Republik Indonesia. (2005). *Informasi Pariwisata Nusantara*. Jakarta: Departemen Jenderal Pemasaran Departemen Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Republik Indonesia.

- [3] Harefa, F. (2011). *Membangun Harapan Menapaki Masa Depan. Studi tentang Budaya Nias*. Jakarta: YTBI
- [4] Hockings, Paul. (1993). *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, East and Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Singapore Burgham Press.
- [5] Kontektualita, Vol. 25, No. 1. (2010). *Leluhur Orang Nias Dalam Cerita-cerita Lisan Nias*. Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan.
- [6] Laiya, Bambowo. (1983). *Solidaritas Kekeluargaan dalam Salah Satu Masyarakat Desa di Nias—Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- [7] Mears, Mary D. (2009). *Choice and Discovery: an analysis of Women and Culture in Flora Nwapa's Fiction*. Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
- [8] Modigliani, Elio. (1890). *Un Viaggio a Nias*, Frateli Treves Editori, Milano.
- [9] Peake, Edward. (2000). *Understanding of Sickness and Healing in South Nias, Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Jogjakarta Bima Pers.
- [10] Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. (1978). *Adat dan Upacara Perkawinan Daerah Sumatera Utara*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.
- [11] Sonjaya, Jajang A. (2008). *Orang Nias – Mereka Memburu Kepala untuk Bekal Kubur*, http://jasonjaya.blogspot.com/2008_04_17_archive.html
- [12] Sonjaya, Jajang A. (2008). *Melacak Batu Menguak Mitos Petualangan Antarbudaya di Nias*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius. Universitas Indonesia.
- [13] Sonjaya, Jajang A. (2010). *Manusia Langit*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius
- [14] Teeuw, A. (1991). *Sastra dan Ilmu Sastra: Pengantar Teori Sastra*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.
- [15] Viaro. (2001). *Ceremonial Sabres of Nias Headhunters in Indonesia*. Arts et Cultures.
- [16] Walford, G. (1991). *Doing Educational Research*: London. Routledge.
- [17] Waluyo, Herman J. (1994). *Pengkajian Cerita Fiksi*. Surakarta: Sebelas Maret University Press.
- [18] Wellek, Rene dan Austin Warren. (1989). *Teori Kesusastraan*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- [19] Wiradnyana, Ketut. (2010). *Legitimasi Kekuasaan pada Budaya Nias*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- [20] Yayasan Bhakti Wawasan Nusantara. (1992). *Profil Propinsi Republik Indonesia Sumatera Utara*. Jakarta: Majalah TELSTRA Strategic Review dan PT Intermedia.
- [21] Zebua, Victor. (2008). *Kisah Awuwukha Pemburuan Kepala Serta Adat Nias, Indonesia*. Jogjakarta: Bima Press