

The Taboos of The Indigenous People of The Jakun Tribe, Kampung Sentosa Lenga, Johor: A Preliminary Survey

Mohamad Suhaizi Suhaimi, Mohamad Yusrizal Mohamad Noor
& Nurul Najihah Abdullah Thani

Department of Malay for International Communication, Kulliyah of Languages and
Management, International Islamic University Malaysia, Pagoh Campus
Email: msuhaizi@iium.edu.my

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Abstract

The taboos of the people from the Jakun tribe has formed a unique identity because there are similarities and differences with the Malays. However, research and documentation related to taboos of the Jakun tribe, especially those living in Kampung Sentosa, Lenga, are seen to be less disclosed to the outside community, thus causing a loss in the study of indigenous people. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify and reveal taboos of the Jakun tribe in Kampung Sentosa, Lenga, Johor. This study was conducted using the qualitative method and involved interviews with two informants in an unstructured manner. The selection of the two informants was based on the NORMs approach by Chambers & Trudgill (1990). Research data was collected through interviews, recording, and observation techniques. The findings show that taboos practiced by the Jakun tribe include pregnant women, giving birth, death, engagement, traditional medicine, entering the forest, and marriage. It was found that the taboos are still practiced until now, but there are some practices that are no longer applied due to the lack of awareness of the importance of preserving their culture.

Keywords: Taboos, Indigenous People, Jakun Tribe, Lenga, NORMs

Introduction

The classification of the indigenous people can be divided into three main ethnic groups, namely Semang-Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malay. Based on research on the way of life, it was found that the three classifications have distinctive characteristics. This is strengthened by the statement by Hamid et al (2018) stated that the indigenous people in Malaysia are quite different from other Bumiputera communities and are known as a heterogeneous race. There are three main groups namely Negrito, Senoi, and Malay-Proto (Abu et al., 2013). The Negrito group consists of the Kensiu, Kintak, Jahai, Lanoh, Mendriq, and Batek tribes while the Senoi group consists of Che Wong, Jahut, Mahmeri, Semai, Semoq Beri, and Temiar. In addition, the

Proto-Malay group consists of the Jakun, Semelai, Seletar, Orang Kanaq, Orang Kuala and Temuan tribes.

Based on the Orang Asli Act 1954 (Act 134) under Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance No. 3 of 1954 which was amended in 1974 has set the terms and qualifications to be said to be an indigenous community are as follows:

1. Anyone whose father is a member of the indigenous people ethnic group, who speaks an indigenous people language and generally follows the indigenous people way of life and the customs of the indigenous people beliefs, and includes a descendant through the male
2. Any person of any race who is adopted as a child by an indigenous people and who has been raised as an indigenous people, habitually speaks an indigenous people's language, follows the indigenous people's way of life and indigenous people's belief customs, and is a member of an indigenous people community; or
3. Children from any unification between an indigenous woman and a man from another race provided that the child normally speaks the indigenous people's language and beliefs and is still a member of an indigenous people community (www.jakoa.gov.my)

The Jakun tribe is an original Malay tribe that lives in the south of Peninsular Malaysia. This Jakun tribe originates from Yunan which is Southern China and started migrating about 5000 years ago (Sa'at & Zakaria, 2013). According to the Orang Asli Affairs Department in 2009, at that time this indigenous people community was nicknamed 'Batang Air' due to their location near the creeks. The Jakun tribe community still practices the belief in animism now even though there are a few of them who have religions such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and so on, on average they still maintain the belief in animism because of the factors of the community's life that are influenced and surrounded by the environment such as mountains, hills, rivers, and forests. The indigenous people of Jakun are led by a leader called Tok Batin. He has full authority over all the affairs of the villagers and even acts and is responsible for the village administration, marriage matters as well as carrying the trust as a head of customs.

The indigenous people of Jakun have a culture that symbolizes the community's identity and self-identity. Furthermore, a society cannot be separated from culture, customs, and the like to form a society that lives guided by rules and taboos. Taboos, or in Malay language, 'pantang larang' is a compound word derived from the words 'pantang' and 'larang'. According to Abdul Aziz (2008), 'pantang' means refraining from doing something because it is believed to bring bad consequences. Therefore, it can be seen that the existence of taboos in the Malay community aims to prohibit an individual or the community from doing inappropriate or impolite acts. The word 'larang', according to her, means to refrain from doing something based on the force of law or regulation, whether written or not. Through the legal system in the law itself, punishment will be imposed if there is an individual or community that violates the law that has been established. The combination of the two compound words produces a meaning that carries the same meaning when viewed from the meaning of each word. Therefore, a taboo is something that is equal to custom and if it is violated either in terms of words or actions, then bad effects will be experienced by the individual concerned or the community as a whole.

Research Objectives

This study focuses on two objectives, namely:

- Identifying taboos of the Jakun tribe in Kampung Sentosa, Lenga Muar Johor
- Revealing the uniqueness of taboos found in the Jakun tribe

Literature Highlights

A journal-style study on the Semai tribe was once conducted by Makhtar et. al (2018) who looked at the community's attitude and perception towards the Semai language and was further developed the following year by Siti Aisah Zailani, Riduan Makhtar and Mohd Sharifudin Yusop with their study that looked at the choice of language in the Semai community. Next, a study on the Jahut tribe was conducted by Adam et al (2018) who examined phonological and lexical aspects as well as a study on the linguistic relationship between the Kentaq language and the Malay language conducted by (Salleh, 2017). In addition, a study on pronouns in the Mendriq tribe was also carried out by Sultan & Ramli (2015) which was also seen as very significant in raising the heritage and art of the indigenous people.

In addition, a study involving the Jakun tribe was also conducted by Kemalok & Mohamed (2018); Sa'at & Zakaria (2013), each focusing on the insect myth of folklore in the Jakun tribe of Peta village. Nevertheless, this study focuses on the taboos practiced by the Jakun tribe of Kampung Sentosa Lenga so that they can be preserved from being swallowed up by the current of modernization. Furthermore, research on the Jakun tribe in Kampung Sentosa has not been carried out, especially involving taboos practiced by the tribe.

Methodology

In order to obtain information about taboos among the Jakun tribe, this study used a semi-structured interview technique. This technique is used to obtain further information about a person's perception, thoughts, attitudes, opinions, and the like (Taylor et al., 2016). Through this method, the researcher has a set of questions that need to be asked to the informant. However, during the interview, the researcher does not need to ask questions in order and sometimes the researcher needs to ask a 'probe' to attract the informant to the main problem. But under normal circumstances, the researcher may let the informant speak until finished. All information is recorded and later transcribed for analysis purposes. In addition to using voice recording tape, the researcher also used a notebook to record important information for further reference.

Two informants named Yang binti Puyuh (60 years old) and Jimin (67 years old) were interviewed to ask about taboos found in the Jakun tribe in Lenga, Muar, Johor. The interview sessions were conducted over two days simultaneously by dividing four people into two groups. Selection of informants based on the NORMs approach by (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998). The factors of age, experience, and long residence in the village of Sentosa, Lenga qualify both informants to be interviewed to achieve the objectives of this study. The selected informants also have a skilled background in terms of speech, culture, and customs of the Jakun tribe. This written documentation of the heritage of the indigenous people is done to preserve the culture and knowledge of their ancestors so that the heritage is permanent and not lost over time.

Research Findings

The researcher divided taboos into seven events, namely during pregnancy, childbirth, engagement, death, traditional medicine, entering the forest, and marriage. For the informants who have been interviewed, Yang binti Puyuh is labeled as I1 (Informant 1), while Jimin is I2 (Informant 2).

Pregnancy (I1)

Pregnant women should not eat seafood such as squid, sardines, and stingrays. In addition, pregnant women are also prohibited from eating stinky bean, dog fruit, and even pineapple. This is because these foods can cause stomach aches and subsequently miscarriage. This taboo is not only held by people from Jakun, but the Malay community also believes in these taboo foods. For example, pineapple is believed to be a forbidden food and must be avoided by pregnant women because pineapple is considered a 'hot' food and is at risk of causing miscarriage, heavy bleeding during childbirth, or birth defects. This statement was presented by Mohamad & Ling (2016) in a study conducted on Malay women who were pregnant and had an antenatal examination at a health clinic in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, the consumption of these foods has been strictly prohibited since the time of the ancestors because the indigenous people believed that there was a fear of miscarriage. However, these foods can be eaten by some pregnant women who can withstand poison and have a high body resistance. According to I1, pregnant women who do not miscarry after eating these foods are very lucky. Unfortunately, for many pregnant women in the community of the Jakun Lenga tribe, they experience miscarriages due to these forbidden foods.

Childbirth (I1)

For women who have just given birth, the people of Jakun origin also have taboos that are not much different from the taboos practiced by the Malays. For example, there are foods that are considered poisonous and should not be eaten such as mackerel. Mothers who have just given birth should not eat mackerel because mackerel is believed to cause post-birth stitches to become itchy. Halim & Rani (2017) in the book entitled "Amalan Perubatan Tradisional Melayu bagi Penjagaan Ibu-Ibu Selepas Bersalin di Negeri Kelantan" also list mackerel as one of the foods that should be avoided because it is included in the group of 'itchy fish'. Therefore, abstinent mothers can consume foods that are believed to help in the process of treating wounds and are nutritious for the mother's body, and provide complete nutrition for her child. For example, snakehead fish, which is believed to help heal suture wounds after childbirth, vegetables, and other foods that are commonly eaten by mothers who have just given birth.

Usually, abstinent mothers also need to get massage treatments from midwives or massage themselves to maintain their health after giving birth. Women among the indigenous people of the Jakun tribe in Lenga also practice the method of massage and 'bertungku' (hot compress) all over the body. For example, applying the hot compress over the 'ari-ari' (abdomen) to soften and shrink the hard uterus after childbirth. From the perspective of the Malays, it also shows that these traditional practices are also practiced by mothers who have just given birth, such as 'bedian' (lying on a bed with a heat source underneath to ease the blood flow of the abstinent mother), 'mandian teresak' (herb bath), massage, hot compress, 'barut perut' (wearing a corset to restore the stomach to its original shape and deflates it), and taking medicines (Mohamed & Bidin, 2012). Not only that, women who have just given

birth need to be very careful when walking anywhere to avoid tripping or falling. More interestingly, women who have just given birth are also not allowed to leave the house for fear that their bodies will catch the cold. In order to prevent that from happening, the indigenous people from the Jakun tribe in Lenga believe that the head should be covered by using a cloth or wearing a hood to prevent the body from catching a cold, headaches, and hair loss.

Death (I1)

As a result of the interview with the informant, the indigenous people of Jakun Lenga tribe who have just lost a family member are forbidden to leave the house and only have to stay at home for a week. Meanwhile, the findings from the interview with I1 related to the event of death revealed that the indigenous people community in Kampung Sentosa, Lenga, especially among women who have just died of their husbands, are prohibited from wearing make-up. This taboo of the indigenous people of Jakun in Lenga also shows similarities with the Muslim Malay community, that is, wives who have just died of their husbands are forbidden to wear ornaments. This can be strengthened by the statement presented on the Official Website of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office (2018), which is the prohibition of wearing or doing things that have decorative elements either on clothing or the body.

Engagement (I1)

There are taboos that must be followed by the bride and groom. This is because newly engaged people are often said to be 'berdarah manis' or 'sweet-blooded'. 'Berdarah manis' refers to a person who is easily harmed or injured (Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, 2015). According to the taboos of the indigenous people of Jakun Lenga for engaged people, they are not allowed to go to the banks of the sea, rivers and enter the forest. This prohibition is due to the sea and river banks and forests being dangerous places. In addition, they are also not encouraged to ride motorcycles for fear of accidents. According to informants, taboos set since their ancestors' time are still held to this day and must be followed by men and women.

After getting engaged, the Jakun community in Lenga also believes that the bride-to-be is not allowed to leave the house for a week. I1 also stated that the ban on leaving the house for a week has been shortened from a month. From the stories of the old people, many accidents have happened as a result of breaking taboos set by the ancestors. Among the incidents shared by informants is the incident of a newly engaged daughter being pounced on by a cat. This incident happened when the woman wanted to cut betel leaves behind the house. The accident has become proof of why this bride-to-be needs to follow the taboos that have been passed down through generations.

Traditional Medicine (I2)

This particular taboo emphasizes that the patient or the person being treated cannot eat chili after being treated by a healer or shaman. The patient must not eat chili during the medicinal period until completely cured and confirmed by the healer. This is because, if the patient breaks the taboo and eats chili, then the pain cannot be cured. The indigenous community of the Jakun Lenga tribe believed that chilies have hot properties that cause pain in the heart, making the medicine ineffective. The informant shared the experience of his own brother who broke the taboo because of disbelief. The informant's brother who had been healthy after being cured by eating chili during the medical period came back sick and could not be cured again.

The Jakun tribal community also maintains customs in medicine when the patient is a woman. If the patient is a woman, then Tepus' leaves are used to touch the patient. This is so because the 'Tepus' leaves have the specialty of being able to treat female patients and at the same time protect the customs and laws of different genders.

Entering the Forest (I2)

The indigenous community of the Jakun tribe in Kampung Sentosa also has similarities with the Malays regarding taboos when entering the forest. The main occupation of the indigenous people from the Jakun tribe is to find forest produce and each has their own garden in the forest. Thus, the daily work that is done is in the forest. The taboo of the Jakun tribal community when in the forest is not to mention unpleasant things that can cause harm. For example, mentioning the names of wild animals such as tigers and snakes. According to the taboo of the ancestors of the Jakun Lenga tribe, the names cannot be mentioned directly because it is like calling the animals. If they want to mention the name of the animals or other dangerous things, it will often be replaced by the call 'orang tu' which refers to the animal or thing.

This taboo that prohibits mentioning the names of these animals and supernatural beings is also synonymous with other communities other than the original people of the Jakun Lenga tribe. For example, the Iban people also replace the names of animals and supernatural beings with euphemisms when they are in the forest. This is because, mentioning the name of an animal directly is feared to bring harm either to oneself or to the people around and property (Daud et al., 2017). Therefore, this matter has become a taboo that needs to be followed and practiced until now in order to create a sense of respect for nature which is the most important element in the life of the indigenous community of Jakun Lenga. Not only that, the belief in animism is also held when entering the forest, that is by asking the ancestors for permission with the purpose of earning sustenance.

Marriage (I2)

The indigenous Jakun community of Kampung Sentosa also has taboos in marriage. According to I2, the indigenous people of Jakun used to hire 'mak andam' or makeup artists from their tribe. This is because the clothes and jewelry used are different from the Malay community. Over the years, generations have changed, causing the marriage to also assimilate with the Malay community. 'Mak andam' or makeup artists are also recruited from the Malay community to do the brides' makeup. Next, marriage affairs are carried out by Tok Batin for the solemnization. Tok Batin will ask the bride and groom for their consent to marry and then carry out the marriage customs based on the customs of the people of the Jakun tribe. The marriage of the Jakun tribe also has a custom of 'merisik' (the act of surveying the potential bride's family by the groom-to-be family in order to get more information about the lady), proposing, and getting married. The custom of proposing is similar to the Malay custom, which is to bring 'sirih junjung' (a bouquet of betel leaves) and gold as a sign of agreement. Traditional Malay customs use the 'tepak sirih' (a metal or wooden container that is used for storing betel leaves) as an introduction in the marriage ceremony, proposing, and engagement, while the 'sirih junjung' becomes the 'head' of the gift and a symbol of multi-level love carried by the bridal party (Saidi, 2015). The marriage of the indigenous people from the Jakun Lenga tribe has a large and strong custom. It is customary for the man to prepare a complete set of gold such as rings, bracelets, and gold necklaces, the price of which must

reach tens of thousands. If the man is not able to prepare the matter completely, then the marriage cannot be carried out.

The Jakun tribal community also has a custom after marriage, that is, the mother of the bride will give a knife to the groom's party while the groom's party will give a spear to the bride's party. The knife and spear are not given to the bride but to members of the newlyweds' families. This is symbolic of the agreement between the two families. The knife and spear were forged by themselves and made by the young people of the tribe.

If there is a divorce or in the language of the Jakun tribe it is called 'mati adat', the man has to pay damages which can reach RM30,000 to RM40,000. The knife and spear that were given should be returned. The bride can punish the groom with a certain amount of money which is approved by the Tok Batin. For example, the bride punishes the groom as much as RM3,800 for 'adat hidup' or during the 'rujuk' (return to the original state of marriage without the requirement of a new solemnization of marriage) period. The man has to pay RM3,800 to the bride in case of 'mati adat' or the 'rujuk' period ends. The groom only needs to pay RM380 to the bride. For couples who are caught in close proximity, the customs in Jakun indigenous tribal marriages are still carried out but do not have to follow the marriage customs related to dowry. The number of marriages is less because they want to protect the dignity of both sides of the family.

Research Implications

The implications of the research findings are found to be able to contribute to the addition of written reference sources through this documentation. Research on the indigenous people from the Jakun tribe who live in Kampung Sentosa, Lenga, Johor is seen to be still under-conducted, resulting in limited academic material to refer to. Therefore, this study is expected to provide input about the indigenous people of Jakun Lenga to be researched more widely and in-depth. In addition, this study can also help in the effort to preserve the taboos of the indigenous people, especially towards the latest generation of the Jakun Lenga tribe which has been a legacy since long ago. The exploration of the customs, culture, taboos, beliefs, language, and economy of the indigenous people will be an initiative in preserving, protecting, and uplifting the heritage of the indigenous people in Malaysia. This can add knowledge in the academic field following the production of written materials about the Jakun indigenous people in Lenga.

Conclusion

Overall, the taboos of the Jakun indigenous people community are a reflection of life, outlook on life, and a symbol of the community's identity. Taboo has become the reason and teaching value for the preservation of a unique culture. However, this community taboo is extinction due to human attitude factors and technological progress. In order to prevent this from happening, the taboos of the Jakun tribe need to be collected and recorded.

This task not only rests with the government through the Department of Indigenous People Affairs but also with concerned researchers. The documented taboos can be a reference source in print or electronic form for general viewing and future generations. Therefore, some suggestions for further research can be done by future researchers, namely research related to the myths and beliefs of the Jakun tribal community not only in Lenga but

also in Kampung Peta, Mersing, for example. Research on these myths and beliefs can be focused on the indigenous people of Jakun who live in Kampung Sentosa, Lenga to ensure that the customs and culture of this community continue to be preserved from being lost to time.

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