

# MORAL CHARACTER AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEMENDE PEOPLE IN ULU DANAU, SOUTH SUMATERA

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## ABSTRACT

*This research was aimed to know the values being implemented in the community to maintain the existence of the custom in Ulu Danau village in South of Sumatera province. The method applied was ethnography with a qualitative approach. Then, the data were collected by observation, which would be analyzed and concluded. The results of the analysis and discussion show that Semende people in the village of Ulu Danau see the custom of Tunggu Tubang and Jenang Jurai as normal things to create the responsible character, and moral character that will be embodied in the implementation of Besundi, Besindat, and Besingkuh. The value of responsibility on Tunggu Tubang custom teaches the value of hard work, the message, honesty, and discipline. As for custom of Jenang Jurai, it is shown through the value of independence, democracy, fairness, and tolerance. Besundi Besindat Besingkuh show the values of mannerism and deportment. Last, it is seen as efforts by the people in the community to maintain the custom by giving the space and an emphasis on it.*

**Keywords:** moral character, moral responsibility, Semende Custom

## INTRODUCTION

The diversity of cultures and customs are proof of plurality owned by the Indonesian people. In daily lives, the culture and customs are a community identity of each region. Therefore, the Indonesians indirectly bind themselves to the customary role as the forum to support the social norms as observed by the public. Kosasih Djahiri as cited in Budimansyah and Syam (2006) say there are six main norms developed in the community and had a role to guide and control human life. These norms form the norm of Islamic religion; cultural customs/traditions; laws beyond the range of human capability; and confidence.

As a binding norm in society, custom indirectly becomes an identity that exists for every individual. The custom which is continuously implemented by a society will naturally shape the character of the individual. Lickona and Wamaungo (2012) explain that forming character in an individual can be through habituation which will become a habit. Habituation is one of the elements of character formation and the moral supporter which is an action or behavior that is constantly made to form a personality contained noble values.

The phenomenon that occurs in this global era recently is the declining of levels of compliance of people to bind themselves to indigenous lives. Some of the elements could be identified as the cause of the reluctance as Hadikusuma (2015) explains that it is due to the mixing of cultures, which it is caused by the distribution of the population (transmigration) throughout Indonesia. Budimansyah (2010) says some of the impacts of the growing globalization are on the mindsets, attitudes, and acts in society.

This article aims to identify the meaning of the indigenous people in the village of Ulu Danau Semende as a traditional conservation effort for its contribution to form characters of the people in South Sumatra. Furthermore, this article is identifying the values contained, as well as the community and governmental efforts to defend the village. This is stated in the goal-oriented education of people as the vehicle to build characters (character building).

## METHODS

This research uses an ethnography research and qualitative research which are conducted in Ulu Danau in South Sumatra. It is chosen as the research location because the previous research emphasizes the function of *Tunggu Tubang* as a person who has responsibility for the blood relatives to live independently. Then, it is also because Ulu Danau is a remoted area that has not been affected by globalization and modernization. The other reason is because the Ulu Danau is one of the traditional villages which still has a dependency on natural products to fill the daily needs (*Komun*), and it has become the traditional village with best customary provisions in the study of the behavior in new order (information obtained from traditional Semende leaders in Ulu Danau).

The participants are selected by some criteria such as people who understand the custom (traditional leaders and community leaders), the holders of customary rights (*Tunggu Tubang* and *Jenang Jurai*), the local community and authorized officials.

Used data collection techniques are observation, interview, and documentation. Furthermore, the data is analyzed by data triangulation technique. It aims to maintain the level of validity and electability obtained during the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of research and analysis about Semende custom shows that responsible characters are contained in *Jenang Jurai* and *Tunggu Tubang*. While, the moral character with oriented social norms is in indigenous communities *Besundi*, *Besindat*, *Besingkuh*. The detail is explained in the below.

Character building is not a passive thing; it requires active participation. Hence, the characters can be the reflection of the someone's personality. In the socio-cultural, character is values that are coherent with each other. Firmansyah (2014) explains that the characters cannot be separated by the behavior of a human being to themselves and others that are materialized in the form of attitude and feeling in harmony with the words and deeds by norms which are derived from religion, culture, and customs. Janaway (2012) states "its character as a thing in itself," something "through which it is indeed the cause of those actions as appearances, but which does not stand under any conditions of sensibility and is not itself appearance." The statement indicated that a character appeared on yourself will be in harmony with the action. Lewis (2005) divides responsibilities into two types, namely: custom responsibility and personal responsibility. Custom responsibility is about traditions, beliefs, and rules. These might come from the family, community, heritage, or faith. People can learn what those are and do their best to respect and follow it. While personal responsibility depends on the people whether to become a person of good character or not. The parents, teachers, religious leaders, scout leaders, and other caring adults will guide them, but only themselves can determine what kind of people they are and ultimately become.

The growing awareness of oneself is a foundation to build a sense of responsibility to others. Responsibility is a reflection of the personality traits of good people in the scope of the family. Responsibility for an act is not only as a subjective perception but also a perception that contains the implementation to people, society and God as a social being. Firmansyah (2014) and Fathurrohman *et al.*, (2013) express the same opinion about responsibility. Responsibility is assumed as a behavior that had an awareness of the obligations that should be done, both to oneself, others and Almighty God.

Tunggu Tubang is defined as a right of the eldest daughter to manage the legacy including gardens, fields, and homes. Responsible characters are reflected through some of the values contained in the custom. First, the value of hard work by managing legacy since the time of planting until harvesting is an obligation of a Tunggu Tubang as title holders of inheritance. During the responsibility, Tunggu Tubang will not hesitate to spend the night in the gardens or fields. Secondly, it is the mandate which is to maintain the existence of treasures to pass to next generation. In managing the treasures, it should be interpreted as something entrusted to the person by the previous generation to be passed to the next generation. Third, it is honesty by telling about the harvest to the relatives and inviting them to harvest together in the field as a reflection of honesty of Tunggu Tubang. Thus, it can be defined as the responsibility learned from the indigenous Tunggu Tubang; people do an obligation on what they trust.

Special custom to the man who has a supervisory function as well as a counter weight of Tunggu Tubang is known as Jenang Jurai. This custom fosters responsible characters and creates a man from Semende tribe with leadership. The Leadership of Jenang Jurai is reflected from the democracy with the relatives, especially at the Apit Jurai. Apit jurai is a trial to resolve disputes amicably. Furthermore, Jenang Jurai must be able to live independently, that Jenang Jurai does not rely on inheritance, but has to live based on the abilities, the skills, the knowledge, and insight. Due to the responsibility as a leader of the relatives, those elements must be mastered.

The values of Jenang Jurai is to shape the responsibility, such as independence, democracy, justice, and communication. Although, Jenang Jurai is a leader to the family, but Meraje and Payung Jurai will supervise Jenang Jurai. Meraje is an uncle of the Jenang Jurai who is controlling over Jenang Jurai and Tunggu Tubang. While, Payung Jurai is the grandmother from the mother line and the highest notch in Semende.

The development of a moral character is a long process and requires many phases. Lickona and Wamaungo (2012) explain that there are at least three stages in the development of moral character. These stages are moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Moral is defined as knowing basic knowledge that should be known by someone. Moral Feeling has a function that is feeling so it could create moral action as desired. According to Dewey and Durkheim in Dill (2007), morality is a distinctly social endeavour. Rejecting the supernatural world as the moral source, people shift to find the source in concrete social experience; in other words, the moral source is experience and society itself. The embedded relationship that is previously shared between religion and morality changed to a similarly entwined relationship between morality, experience, and society.

The moral sayings, which people often hear and speak in daily life, is often identified as the patterns of a person's behavior in life. Therefore, the moral assessment is an assessment that is oriented towards norms or provisions existing in society. Moral can interpret as a realization of personality or mental generally not only as a result of thinking but also requiring all parties to contribute to it (Daradjat, 1977). Then, Barnawi and Arifin (2014) suggest a moral as an honest behavior which implied mutual respect and helping. While Dewey in Rukiyati *et al.*, (2014) say moral could be interpreted as "concern nothing less than the whole character, and the whole character is identical with the man in all his concrete make-up and manifestations. To possess virtue does not signify to have cultivated a few namable and exclusive traits; it means to be fully and adequately what one is capable

of becoming through association with others in all the offices of life. The moral and the social quality of conduct are, in the last analysis, identical with each other".

Family contributions, in this case, is a basic moral foundation. Then, the basic foundation will be strengthened through community contributions. The affected environment will need the role of community leaders or clergy as a guard to protect the existence of these norms.

The main point in the custom of Besundi, Besindat, Besingkuh is moral. Elements contained in this custom is to manage someone in behaving with others. The elements of tolerance, courtesy, mutual respect, and communication are the main items in this custom.

In practice, respecting elders and relative, with different gender is set in this custom. The distinction of how to speak the word is differentiated by age, custom position, and gender. The words of "you" to an older person is *Beliau*, it can be used to a person domiciled higher than others to state that people respect that person. For the gender either men or women, it can use *Kabah* that indicates the equality between them. The word *Dengah* is used to talk with the different gender to respect each other. Some behavior that is still considered taboo and is not reflected someone's habit is when a man sits next to his sister or performs an excessive joking. This custom is called Besingkuh. Another thing that is still considered taboo in society is when relative siblings meddle their siblings' private things. The things considered taboo by the society which has the purpose of keeping their privacy so that they will distance themselves from personal things.

People who are supposed to be in the group of people to live together in a place or region, bind themselves to a value that has been mutually agreed to create a harmonious atmosphere. The value agreed by the community is the result of a habit that is continuously repeated, causing the meaning to an act which is often done. To strengthen the act that has been redundant, the custom appeared in a community.

People who still tie themselves to a habit or custom is often attached to the traditional society. Adhesion is set as a differentiator with modern society. Traditional society is classified by Hadikusuma (2015) as one of the elements contained on indigenous peoples. The traditional society still maintains the habit since the first until now. The reasons why the indigenous people remain reluctant to release the customs of their lives are because custom has been perceived as nature which is in accordance with the will of nature, and to avoid the disappearance of happiness that has been built for a long time (Dewantara, 2013).

Then, some identification of the properties owned by customary law in the community includes loads of confidence in unseen things (*Religio Magis*), dependency on natural products (communes), the act of significant symbolic (constant), and real embodiment in action (Concrete) (Setiady, 2008).

Rerabeis held before the day of Eid. The figure of a man dresses like beggars who is paraded around the village by people regarded this as amusement rides before holding the Eid holy day. In addition to presenting an amusement to the public before the holiday, this show can also be interpreted as a reminder to the community that everyone must purge their mistakes on the Eid holy day.

Self-cleaning is conducted through forgiving each other. Learning can also be taught to children on that occasion. Lessons are usually taught by parents is about a figure described by Rerabe. Parents usually give an understanding that Rerabe is a figure for the child that does not behave well according to custom views.

Semende people are one of the indigenous communities in the province of South Sumatera. By region, the Semende people in South Sumatera are divided into three parts by the indwelling of the

community. First, Semende Besemah people, there are Semende people living in the area around Mount Dempo including Pagar Alam, Lahat, and others. Second, Semende Lembak people live in some areas in Ogan Komering Ulu Selatan. Third Semende Dahat peoples are in the area around Muara Enim and others.

Most Semende people are concerned about matrilineal relatives or people who take on the maternal line as the main player. Hadikusuma (2015) assumes that the Semende people draw a line such as the maternal uncle, and grandfather as the parents for relatives present in the tribe.

Semende peoples as indigenous communities in South Sumatera are known by its custom, which is *Tunggu Tubang*. It is a custom for the oldest daughter in Semende society who has the right to manage the treasures in the form of gardens, fields, and homes. Besides their *Tunggu Tubang* custom, they have *Jenang Jurai* in Semende that is for a son that has a role in supervising the treasures; and they also have *Besundi*, *Besindat*, and *Besingkuh* as the prevailing norms in the Semende people.

To give a better picture about how the position and status of a person in the tribe, Figure 1 illustrates the chart of custom positions, those are are *Payung Jurai*, *Meraje*, *Tunggu Tubang*, and *Jenang Jurai*.

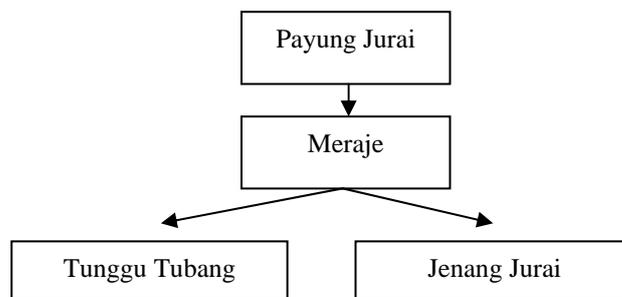


Figure 1 Custom Positions  
(Source: Author 2016)

Notes:

*Payung Jurai* : grandmother or grandfather from *Tunggu Tubang* and *Jenang Jurai*

*Meraje* : The mother`s brother of *Tunggu Tubang* and *Jenang Jurai*.

*Jenang Jurai* : brothers of *Tunggu Tubang*

*Tunggu Tubang* : The eldest daughter in a family.

To understand the use of language by age, custom position, and gender, Tutuean scheme. This can be seen in Figure 2.

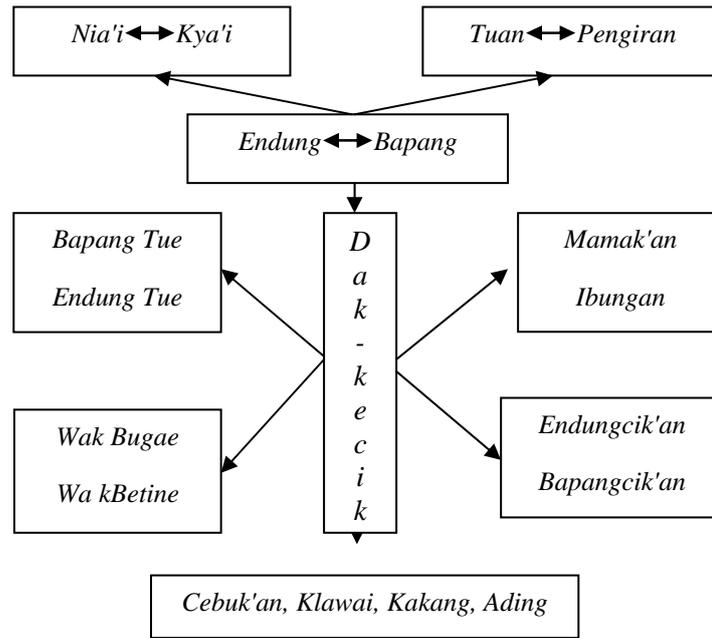


Figure 2 Tutuean Family Scheme  
(Source: Author, 2016)

Notes:

- Niai and Kyai* : refer to the mother-in-law (*nia'i*) and father in law (*kyai*) for the son-in-law.  
*Tuan and Pengiran* : refer to a mother-in-law (*Tuan*) and father-in-law (*Pengiran*) for a daughter-in-law.  
*Endung and Bapang* : refer to the mother (*Endung*) and father (*Bapang*).  
*Wak bugae and Betine* : refers to the elder brother of the father or mother who had the same gender.  
*Mamak'an Ibungan* : refers to mother's brother or father's with different gender.  
*Endungcik'an Bapang cik'an* : refers to mother's younger brother and father's brother with the same gender.  
*Cebuk'an* : refers to elder brother for woman.  
*Klawai* : refers to sister by brother.  
*Kakang* : refers to older brother for younger brother.  
*Ading* : refers to the older brother to younger brother.  
*Dak Kecik* : refers to the children.

Act No. 6 of 2014 concerning the village in point C Article 4, it states the mandate to the village government to preserve and promote the customs, traditions, and culture existing in the local communities. It can be done by strengthening custom through some of the elements that exist in the community such as government, traditional leaders, community leaders, and people. Some ways that can be done are: 1) Strengthening the role of traditional leaders to actively disseminate custom to the community; 2) Giving the legal status to the traditional leaders through village regulations; 3) Urging the public to actively ask the traditional leaders about the indigenous understanding; 4) Asking all parties to participate in maintaining the existence of custom by entrusting the traditional leaders to examine deeply the customary rules based on Tjahaja Simboer's book and adjusted with the challenges facing the era. The conservation efforts are expected to strengthen customs that have been handed down by the ancestors before.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Responsible character in the research is depicted through a custom implementation of Tunggu Tubang and Jenang Jurai. In Tunggu Tubang, it has responsibility values such as hard work, maintaining trust, and honesty. Meanwhile, the responsible character of Jenang Jurai is the implementation of the values of independent living, through democracy and communication. Then the moral character depicted through a custom implementation Besundi, Besindat, Besingkuh focuses on behaviors and attitudes through talking, that is according to the three classifications to whom they interact, namely to the older, customary position, and the gender. Behavior and use of language in talking are influenced by siblings scheme or Tutuean.

To maintain the existence of this custom, they rely on Semende peoples who still run their heritated custom containing the noble values. Then the contents of this noble values can be used as a contribution to science education based on customs cultural or local wisdom.

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