
**AN ANALYSIS ON SYMBOLISM USED IN REBA
TRADITION AT GURU SINA**

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Abstract: *Reba* Tradition is part of *Guru Sina*'s tradition and an event which is interested to participate, many kinds of symbols used on it. *Reba* Tradition is not separated from language. By using language, the researcher can express our thought, idea, emotion, and feeling. Because language is an important aspect of human life and social communication among the members of society. Therefore, the researcher has been interested in studying this problem by formulating four researcher problems such as: What is the background of *Reba* Tradition at *Guru Sina*? How are the implementation process of *Reba* tradition at *Guru Sina*? What are symbols and meaning of those symbols are used in *Reba* tradition at *Guru Sina*? and What are functions *Reba* tradition for people at *Guru Sina*? This study has two significances of the study, theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the result of this study will give the description about the symbols are used in *Reba* tradition. Practically, the researcher hopes this research is useful to enrich *Reba* tradition and as additional knowledge for people or student both from Ngada or others. The research of this thesis is descriptive qualitative research. It is intended to describe about the symbols, and also the symbols meaning used in *Reba* tradition.

Key words: Symbols and *Reba* Tradition

Introduction

Human being is a creature that lives in a group and biologically has an organ that is in under capacity of physical capability in case compared with another creature like animals. Although human being has weaknesses, but their brain already developed by language to form ideas and concepts for choose the alternative action in human. According to Koentjaraningrat (1990:78), ideas and concepts are able to communicate with symbols which we call as language. Language causing the human being to obtain a study about environment with concretely experience without get comprehension of that event. Based on the definition above, it can be concluded that only human possesses a language that is used to communicate or interact with their group.

Language has a big contribution for people in daily interaction. According to Wardaugh (1973:122) stated that language is a system arbitrary vocal symbol used for human communication.

Language is very useful in social relation, especially to express our feeling, emotion, and idea. By using language, all of man can interact and communicate each other in society life. This fact proves that human beings cannot be separated one and another in their life.

Human beings certainly live together whereas interaction happens in a society life. Society itself can be described as gather of human associate or interaction. They always use language to interact among human being. In other words, definition of society is the unity of human life that

has a custom which always organize their daily life and finally its form a culture. Culture has close relationship with tradition, habit, custom, belief and the circle of life.

Culture begins with giving a viewpoint, and then language gives the oral idea of expression which responses to the viewpoint. As one example is *Reba* traditional ceremony that still preserved. *Reba* tradition has symbols that left a message in it. To know the meaning of *Reba* tradition, the researcher used semiotic analysis method. Semiotic is a science or analytical method to assess the sign or symbol. Symbol is sign that has a hidden meaning to represent something and it call as symbolism. Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense.

In this study the researcher would like to deeply learn about the meaning of symbols used in *Reba* tradition at Guru Sina village. Although there are many traditional ceremony such as *Ja'i* (traditional dance), *Ka Sa'o* (inauguration ceremony of a new traditional house), *Mata* (funeral ceremony), and *Reba* (expression of gratitude ceremony). The most famous ceremony is *Reba* tradition, that the researcher uses to explain in this research.

Reba is traditional ceremony that aims to honor and grateful to the services of the ancestors. This ceremony is also used to evaluate many things about social life in the previous year that have been undertaken by the society of Ngada, especially in Guru Sina society. In this ceremony, every people will ask for guidance of God and ancestor to have a better life in

the New Year. The ceremony is held in every New Year, precisely on January and February. The main course in this party is *uwi* and it symbolizes a source of never-ending food provided by the earth. *Reba* is not just a party, but a form of *gajagora* (excitement) in Ngada community. *Reba* ceremony can be seen in each district that is located in Ngada regency such as Aimere, Bajawa, Golewa, and Jerebu'u. Furthermore, the researcher only focuses to study on *Reba* tradition that celebrated in Guru Sina village.

Geographically, the location of Guru Sina village is in Ngada Regency, NTT Province, Flores Island. Watumanu village as a research area with the capital Guru Sina. Topography of this hilly region is surrounded by a few times to dry and the people on the plantation side slope above average of 40° C. The climatic conditions with six cycles of wet, ranging from November to April, and six dry months between May until October. At present, 33 families live in Guru Sina, belonging to the three clans such as *Ago Ka'e*, *Ago Azi*, and *Kabi*.

There are several reasons why the researcher is interested to observe about symbols used in *Reba* tradition. First, to know the background of *Reba* tradition implementation. Second, the researcher wants to know about the implementation processes of *Reba* tradition. Third, to know symbols and meaning of those symbols are used in *Reba* tradition and the functions of *Reba* tradition for people at Guru Sina.

Research on symbolism used in *Reba* tradition at Guru Sina is expected to provide benefits are:

The result of this study is expected to be useful for the researcher to get knowledge

about symbolism that is used in *Reba* tradition in Ngada culture.

Literature Review

Literature review is basically theory and concept of absolute scientist used in the writing of science or research that can be tested truth. The researcher explains the theories that are closely related to the topic of this study. In order to maintain the validity and complexity related to the topic, the researcher will discuss clearly in this discussion. For more detail we can see explanations about theory below:

Language is an important part of communication in human being interaction, whenever, everywhere, and whatever form of communication. It means that, language cannot be separated from people around society. The crucial of language in human life is to determine the way how they make communication each others. Some definitions of language are sounds, words, gestures, and etc. All of these are used by human to deliver something or communicate thoughts and feelings.

Human beings is a creature which live in a group and biologically has an organ that be in under capacity of physical capability in comparison with another creature like animals. Although they have weaknesses, human brain already developed by language to form ideas and concepts for choose the alternative action in human regimen.

Language and Culture

The relation between language and culture is not far from the truth which use in society. The area of overlap between language and culture consist of all part of language as a way of signaling identity with one cultural

group and difference from others. Language and culture according to Ronald (1998:216) stated that the relation between language and culture is the structure of the language determines the way in which speaker of that language view the world. A somewhat weaker version is that structure does not determine the world-view but still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of the language toward adopting a particular world-view.

Symbol

Symbols are the basis for all human understanding and serve as vehicles for conception for all human knowledge. According to Williams (1971: 69) colors often have symbolic connotation: in the western world, "red" brings to mind anger (and communism), "blue" emotional depression, "yellow" cowardice, "white" purity and innocence, "black" evil and mourning (although among black, there has been a recent trend to reverse the traditional symbolism by associations "black" with goodness and "white" with badness. To the human mind, symbols are cultural representations of reality. Symbols associated with different experiences and perceptions in every kinds of culture. Thus, as a representation, a symbol's meaning is neither instinctive nor automatic. The culture's members must interpret and over time reinterpret the symbol. Symbols occur in different forms of language such as verbal or nonverbal, written or unwritten, and gestures.

Reba Tradition

Reba is a traditional ceremony that aims to do attribute and words of gratitude to the ancestors. The ceremony wasalsousedto evaluate many

things about social life in the previous year that has been undertakenby the community of Ngada. In this ceremony, families and communities asking for guidance of God and ancestors to have a better life in the New Year.

The ceremony is held in every New Year, precisely on January or February. The host for this ceremonyevery year always turn son. The day before begin *Reba* celebration, performedthe opening ceremony(*su'iuwi*). On the night of the events*su'iuwi*, people which present at the time will do *kamaki Reba* (eat and drink) while waiting for morning. In the morning, whenthe ceremonytakes place, guests are provided withfoodand drinks thatare ripe andready to eat(*Ngetabghingia*, *mamiutumogo*. *Kasipapa vara*, *inu si papapinu*).The main courseinthis partyis *uwi*. For Ngada residents, *uwi*heralded asa source ofnever-endingfoodprovided bythe earth. Therefore, Ngada residents will never have an experience of food insecurity or mal nutrition.

This ceremonyisto combinetraditionalelements with religion. Outsidethe church, a festive atmosphere to grow traditional ceremonies, when the audience and the dancers presented withone or two glasses of wine (*tuaara*). However, *Reba*is notjusta party, buta form of*gajagora* (excitement) of Ngada community while maintaining the feel of the spiritual.

Guru Sina

Guru Sina is one of the many traditional villages in the Ngada Regency. Ngada is a county in the central part of Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. The capital of Ngada Regency is *Bajawa*,

which has the total area of 3037.9 km², with a population of 250,000 ±. Ngada has three major parts, namely *Nagekeo Tribe*, *Bajawa Tribe*, and *Riung Tribe*.

Guru Sina village is located in *Jerebu'u Valley*, on the foothills of *Mount Inerie*, approximately 25 km to the south of Bajawa city. Guru Sina consists of 33 traditional high-thatched roofed houses, positioned around a four-tier terraced communal area, with various symbols of the Ngada culture spread throughout. Other neighboring traditional villages includes, *Tololela*, *Bena*, *Luba*, *Nage*, *Deru*, *Pali*, and *Bela*. Up to the present day, the staple crops grown by the inhabitants of Guru Sina are corn, tubers, coconut, and banana, as well as coffee, cloves, candlenut, and cocoa as popular cash crops.

Methods

Based on the intention of this study the method to be adopted is descriptive qualitative method. A method, which is commonly, applied in social studies, culture studies, and literature studies.

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the participant's perspective. Understanding is acquired by analyzing the many contexts of the participants and by narrating participant's meanings for these situations and events. Participant's meanings include their feeling, beliefs, ideas, thoughts, and actions (Malinowski, 1922:373).

Data and Source of the Data

To get the data, the researcher uses *Reba* tradition as the subject of this study. The sources of the data are taken from some of relevant data that support the analysis by watched that *Reba*

tradition closely. By having a close watch of that event with such qualification, hopefully, the researcher gets as valid and accurate data as possible. The objects of the study are terms and symbols are used on *Reba* tradition. The source of data such as personal experience, from theory, and from journal.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation is very important to obtain the data. To collect the accurate of the data, it is necessary to use some of instrumentations, these instruments are: documentation, observation, field note, and interview.

Data Collection

The purposes of data collection are to get the validity in collecting some data and to avoid bias data in this study.

In collecting the data, the researcher gets his data from subject and object by using different techniques. The data for this thesis were collected from some books, internet that concerning with the thesis, and from the informant who know well about Ngada culture, especially in *Reba* tradition. The important thing in writing this thesis is the data are obtained through the following steps:

1. Reading several books and thesis that have close relation with the researcher thesis.
2. Browsing some data from internet that related with the *Reba* tradition.
3. Doing the interview (asking some culture concerning with terms and symbols which are used in *Reba* tradition).

4. Consulting the data with the informants in order to check the misinterpretation in his data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is very important in every observation and interview, because data analysis is the organized process to rub with the data in design, category and the unity base analysis. The function of data analysis is to know the result of the interview.

In this study, the researcher analyzed all the data taken from the result of interview.

Trustworthiness of the Data

To avoid bias data in this study, the researcher uses triangulation involves gathering data from multiple sources in order to minimize and understand any differences/biases held by in various roles.

In this study, the researcher use investigator triangulation and make a communication with other people in comparing notes to extend the researcher's mind. Here, there are a few steps used in this technique to make sure that the data is still valid. Firstly, the researcher watches the video of the ceremony in order the data he collected are appropriate with source. Secondly, the researcher consulted the data with some friends in obtaining more important information to add the researcher knowledge in finishing his analysis. Finally, the researcher discussed the data that he got with Mr. Alosius Dopo. This is a way for getting the different ideas which useful for an expanding analysis and also to know the validity of the data.

Findings

The Background of *Reba* Tradition

The background of the execution on *Reba* ceremonies closely related to the meaning or the purpose of the ceremony itself. It is closely related to the annual cycle of agrarian life at Guru Sinavillage, ranging from planting to harvest. In this case, the researcher would like to explain some steps that held in *Reba* tradition at Guru Sina Village, such as:

“*Rau Uma Mata Ngi'a*”

Each sub-clan in the Ngada custom has sub-clan fields called *Uma Mata Ngi'a*. *Uma Mata Ngi'a* (a custom field) has a very important role in a series of agricultural or farming activities for the community in general and for traditional society of Guru Sina in particular (Emanuel Ga'e). *Uma Mata Ngi'a* is decisively start planting by sub-clan members. Each member of the sub-clans could grow on their farm if the field had been planted. *Uma Mata Ngi'a* provides materials for the New Year celebration that known as *Reba*.

“*Bu Mata Siu*”

The second stage in that life cycle of agricultural society at Guru Sinavillage is *Bu Mata Siu* (Emanuel Ga'e). In literally, this term means blindingsparrows. *Bu* means blind; *mat* means the eye; *siu* means sparrow. The ceremony is conducted in order to drive out the *kolo* (doves) and sparrow that are pests of rice that has been planted. The ceremony is performed at the time with *zo'ain* the fields that generally fall in *Bolo* month.

“*Su Guru*”

Su Guru is the third stage in the cycle of agricultural life of Guru Sina society. *Su* means the plant by piercing into the ground; *guru* means aur.

SuGuru means planting a *gaur* (Francis Riwu). In this ceremony, *aur* (small bamboo) will be planted closely with *Uwi*, that *uwi* leaves a panhandle, circling, and bind themselves to the *guru*.

Process of *Reba* Tradition

Each of activities were implemented by the public has a structure and process, as well as the *Reba* party performed by Guru Sina villagers. Based on the results of the interview can be described as a series of activities or processes of *Reba* tradition, such as:

“*Tére Wesu*”

Reba party celebration has always been characterized by the announcement made by *Kepo Wesu*, the clan who has the right to make announcements.

Reba party determination is done by looking at the motion of the moon. In Guru Sina village, the movement of months in *Sawi* (around December) considered carefully. When dark moon appears at the time, it will be announced that *Reba* implemented within 14 days. This announcement is called *Tere Wesu*. In the vulnerable period of fourteen days is the period of *Reba* preparation.

“*Wasi Loka Lanu*”

Lokalanu is a blend of *Loka Tua* and *Watu Lanu* (a place of worship). *Wasilanu* is done by all men *Ana Woe*, *ilibhou*, *anasa'o*, and *sipopali*, because every *Ngadhu* has its own *lokalanu*.

“*Dheke Reba*”

The first day of a series of *Reba* ceremonies is *Kobe Dheke Reba*. On this night all the members of the

subclan regroup in their traditional houses. At night there is no *ritesu'iuwi*. *Uwi* along with *su'aput* under the entrance to the main part of the traditional house. *Uwi* and *su'* placed (generally with a transverse position), then known as *kobewalasu'a*.

“*Be Uwi Sa'o*”

The core implementation of the event *Reba* day is on the second day, because on this day all the family (*Ana Woe*), every *Ana Sa'o*, even though guests who attended this event will visit each house from one house and another house for *Ka Maki Reba* (eating together).

“*Su'i Uwi*”

The event of *Su'i Uwi* divided into three parts, such as *Dhoi Uwi*, *Su'i Uwi*, and *Ngedhi Uwi*.

“*O Uwi*”

This night is the opening night for the people of the of Guru Sina village to sing and dance in the middle of the village. Everyone was invited to come down from the house and play in the middle of the village. The invitation dance is called *Keloghae*. Then together they would sing while dancing in the middle of the village.

“*Dhegha Leza*”

On this day the villagers of Guru Sina hold a party with dancing and singing all day. That is why they named today as *dhéghaleza*. *Dhégha* means stinking or play around and *leza* means the day. This activity marks the loss of a ban on the passage of livestock and draw leaf (*wunungeta*) in the middle of the village. It is characterized by

bringing young reed stems and stalks of corn while singing and dancing.

“Wari Wako”

This day is called *Leza Wari Wako*. *Leza* means the day of, *war* means sunning and *Wako* means reed. Literally, it means the day of sunning reed. But in fact, today is a day to rest after dancing and singing. On that day the people clean all the reeds and discard them.

“Ire”

Ire is the last day of the *Reba* party series at Guru Sina village. On this day, all the community of Guru Sina village is not allowed to go to their fields for work or do any activities. The community of Guru Sina village stopped their routine work, should not be drinking (*arak*, *tuak*, etc.), and should not be making noise, even though they should not have sex. *Reba* party depletes much energy and thoughts, then *ire* is used as a day for rest. In addition, the Guru Sina villagers believe that if people work on *ire*, the pests will re-enter to their field.

The Symbols and Meaning of those Symbols are used in *Reba* Tradition

Reba generally known in the daily life of people at Guru Sina village. Some tools are used when pass down this ceremony and has symbolic meanings and values. Based on observation and interviews, the researcher describe the following symbolic tools that used in *Reba* ceremony that performed by the community of Guru Sina village.

“Uwi”

Uwi plays a central role in *Reba* ceremony. *Uwi* always called in song and dance during *Reba* celebrations, and also required to be eaten by every member of the sub clans. If someone who do not attend the *Su'i Uwi* rites and never eat the *Uwi* will be prosecuted and fined.

“Su'a”

In *Reba* celebration, *Uwi* linked to *su'a*. This is because *Su'a* is a symbol of *Sa'o Pu'u* existence. *Aur* implanted close with *Uwi* to refute overhung of *Uwi*. *Aur* planting is also a symbol of binding (fusion) of *su'a* on *uwi*. All of those symbolizes a unity.

“Aze Nao” (Ijuk Rope)

To perform the *Rite Su'i Uwi*, firstly *Uwi* and *Su'a* are coupled with *Nao* rope that used to bind. This rope is used for various purposes, because that rope is enough strong and because at that time there are no nails or metal that can be used to strengthen everything.

“Laja Sue”

In *Su'i Uwi* rite, when the accelerator recite the basic teachings of *Su'i Uwi*, he hack *laja sue* (knife) into the tip of *uwi* with slowly. At the end of the recitation of *Su'i Uwi* doctrine, *laja sue* pressed firmly until *Uwi* cutting down into two parts.

“Sege (Nyiru)”

Overall the ingredients used *nyiru* in the *Reba* party. When the ongoing of *Reba* party, *Uwi* which placed with *Laja Sue* remain above of *nyiru*. In everyday life, *nyiru* used to winnow rice, corn, beans, and other foodstuffs.

The Functions of *Reba* Tradition for People at Guru Sina

“As an expression of gratitude to God”

The main function of the *Reba* ceremony is excitement. Singing and dancing are two activities that always exist in the *Reba* tradition. The Guru Sina villagers are thankful for the gift of life they have experienced during the previously year that has passed and asking a blessing for the New Year.

“As a Thanksgiving and Rejoice”

On this occasion, all the family members tried to attend and think back to the history of their ancestors. According to Yoseph Tua Demu, *Reba* party into historic memories like the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land or the migration of Muslims from Mecca to Medina. Therefore, it is not surprising that people who are in overseas Ngada, on this occasion sought wherever possible return to celebrate the great *Reba* with the whole family. *Reba* party has been united in their hearts. At this moment, they can be grateful and rejoice.

“As a Moment of Unity”

Reba celebration is a unity celebration. Each member of the sub-clan will return to Sa'o Pu'u, gather and celebrate their togetherness.

“As the Moment for Resolving Problems”

Reba celebration is also used to resolve conflicts or problems. To implement this ceremony, villagers of Guru Sina set two specific occasions, consist of: on the first night and on the seventh day night.

“As a Respect for the Nature”

One part in a series of *Reba* celebrations is *sire*. The word *ire* is derived from the word *pire* which means forbidden, taboo, or restricted. In *Reba* party, *ire* is a special term used for a ban on land wounding. At the time of this *ire* hallowed soil of pests. Therefore, it is *pire gare* (very restricted) to injure the soil or working on the fields.

Discussion

Based on the analysis above, it clarifies that *Reba* tradition is traditional ritual from Jerebu'u sub district which held by certain people who have wealth and capable of economic. According to Yoseph Tua Demu (1993), *Reba* tradition is an inheritance of culture from the ancestors that should be protected and continued by the new generation, because it has deepest meaning of life for Guru Sina society. In this ceremony, there are three steps that must be passed by people who held the *Reba* tradition, such as *Rau Uma Mata Ngia*, *Bu Mata Siu*, and *Su Guru*. Furthermore, there are nine processes of *Reba* like *Tere Wesu*, *Wasi Loka Lanu*, *Dheke Reba*, *Be Uwi Sa'o*, *Su'i Uwi*, *Dhoro Maru/O Uwi*, *Dhegha Leza*, *Wari Wako*, and *Ire*. Besides, this ceremony has its own characteristics and values which reflecting all about Guru Sina social life.

The purpose of this analysis is to know the symbols and the meaning of symbols which are used in *Reba* tradition, where these symbols are related to the human life especially in Guru Sina societies. Generally, the people of Guru Sina usually use animals and plants as the symbol of *Reba* tradition. For example, buffalo, horse, pig, chicken, rice, wine, areca nut and so forth. Each of the symbols has their own

meaning and it used since the ritual held firstly in the past by the ancestors.

As written on the analysis above, there are many functions and values that are revealed in *Reba* tradition. These are quite influence the existence of Guru Sina society and harmonious relationship between one tribe and others in unity of incredible people. Moreover, by this ritual, people who held this *Reba* tradition can share the lucky toward others people who are very much to seek. This ceremony has great functions and values for the entire people of Guru Sina.

In conclusion, based on the analysis of the symbols which are used in *Reba* tradition as presented previously, the researcher summarizes that the symbols are subject or something else represented by other things in which designed on certain concepts and it has the own meaning in human life. On the observation, the researcher found many symbols that are reflecting all about human life of Guru Sina society used in *Reba* tradition, such as *Uwi*, *Su'a*, *AzeNao*, *Laja Sue*, and *Sege*. In addition, there are also values that appeared in this ritual and these have great functions for social life in increasing a harmonious relationship of Guru Sina society in generally.

Conclusion

In this part, the researcher concludes that *Reba* tradition is the event which shows the significant phases of life for Guru Sina society. The ritual of *Reba* is an inheritance that should be preserved, because this ritual

revealed the deepest meaning of the people in the village. This ceremony is rich of the symbolism and terms. Many of the symbols are dominated representation of animals and plants.

Reba ceremony is the totality of ordinances indigenous people of Ngada customary to celebrate the New Year. The celebration was held not just as an obligation, but because of their indigenous awareness and willingness of community supporters. They saw that the ceremony contains a value that is useful to man, society, and even the natural order.

The process of *Reba* ceremony is divided into eleven steps that should be passed by people who held the ceremony of *Reba*, it consist of *Rau Uma Mata Ng'i'a*, *Bu Mata Siu*, *Su Guru*, *Tere Wesu*, *Wasi Loka Lanu*, *Dheke Reba*, *Be Uwi Sa'o*, *Su'i Uwi*, *Dhoro Maru/O Uwi*, *Dhegha Leza*, *Wari Wako*, and *Ire*. Besides, this ceremony has

its own characteristics and values which reflecting all about social life of Guru Sina society.

Based on the research of *Reba* Tradition, there are many functions and values that are revealed in *Reba* Tradition. These are quite influence the existence of Guru Sina society and harmonious relationship between one tribe and others in unity of incredible people. This ceremony has great functions and values for the entire people of Guru Sina.

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