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RITUALS IN SARAWAK

Awang Hasmadi Awang Mois

THE PEOPLE

The Selako are one of the Dayak groups who inhabit the Lundu district of Kuching Division, Sarawak, East Malaysia. They are part of the larger Selako Dayak community who occupies the southwestern part of Borneo, especially along the border areas between Sarawak and Kalimantan Indonesia.

Adelaar (1991: 1) estimates that the total population of the Selako Dayak in both areas number about 15,000 persons. Kaboy and Sandin (1968) give a total figure of 14 Selako settlements in Sarawak viz., Kampung (henceforth abbreviated to Kg.) Sebat, Siru, Pueh, Paon, Serayan, Semapu, Keranji, Sebako, Biawak, Pasir Ulu, Jangkar, Rukam, Sebiris and Titiakar. The list provided by Kaboy and Sandin refers to the major Selako villages that are found in Lundu district today. Among these villages, Kg. Pueh is reckoned to be the biggest of all Selako settlements with a population of approximately 630 people (Awang Hasmadi 1979). Hudson (1978) describes the Selako language as Malayic-Dayak; it is a language which is closely related to Malay and Iban.

Most of the Selako villages are located on the eastern side of Pueh range, a small group of mountains which stretch some fifteen miles from Mount Pueh in the north to Mount Kliau in the south (Schneider 1974: 7). However, unlike some other Selako villages Kg. Pueh and its sister village Kg. Siru are situated closer to the coast. Their proximity to the coast not only allow the two areas to have access to the produce of the sea but also enable the Selako in the area to make use of the swamps for wet or swamp padi cultivation. At present a large number of the Selako in the area own motor boats for fishing. For some, fishing serves as an important source of additional income. The other Selako villages are scattered along the Lundu-Sematan trunk road as well as the Lundu-Biawak road. Because of its hilly topography, hill padi is the main agricultural activity in the area of Kg. Biawak apart from rubber and pepper cultivation. Nevertheless, for Kg. Pueh and Kg. Biawak Mount Pueh provides an imposing backdrop and its ritual significance may be noted in one Selako myth. It is on the slopes of Mount Pueh that the Selako normally cultivate their hill *padi*.

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BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SELAKO

The original home of the Sarawak Selako was near Singkawang in West Kalimantan Indonesia. In that period of their settlement in Indonesia the Selako were under the Sultan/Panambahan of Sambas (Kalom and Hudson 1970). Later some of the group migrated to Sarawak. Kaboy and Sandin maintain that the quest for fertile land was the main factor motivating their migration into Sarawak (1968: 136). There were two series of migration to Sarawak: one

involving the Selako group who are now settled along the Sematan-Pueh trunk road and another who are settled in Samadak and the area along the Lundu-Biawak road. At one stage in the history of the Pueh Selako settlement in Sarawak they also took part in the *semah* or offering ceremony together with the Malays on the Talang-Talang Island (Harrisson 1950: 105-125).

SELAKO SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In common with many other Bornean peoples the Selako are a cognatic society with a corporate descent group structure. Although an egalitarian society, status and wealth distinctions are important in ordering interpersonal relations. Political authority and control are held by a small group of closely related families who are descendants (*katurunan*) to the founders of the longhouse/village. Combined with the principle of descent (*katurunan*) the right to hold office is tied with the possession of the ritual paraphernalia associated with a particular office.

The basic unit of their social and economic organization is a small family group called *biik* (cf. Iban *bilik*). The members of a *biik* constitute a single household, occupying one separate apartment (*biik*) in a longhouse or a separate family dwelling in villages without the longhouse structure. Members of the *biik* act together as a corporate economic unit. Together they own rights in land and certain items of personal property viz., gongs, jars and heirloom jewellery (Schneider 1978: 62). The *biik* is also important as a ritual unit carrying its own rituals and with its own ritual prohibitions. Leadership of the *biik* is vested in a single senior couple called *tuha biik* ('*biik* elder'). Following the death of the senior male, his widow may assume the position of *biik* elder. Authority over the *biik* is usually handed over to the younger generation when the senior couple find that they can no longer contribute much to the household. The occasion to do this is normally during the *ngabayatn*.

According to Schneider a traditional Selako house generally consists of two main parts, the family room (*biik*) and the gallery (*saami'*). The *biik* is the family living room and the place where personal property such as clothes and valued heirlooms are stored (1975: 210). The gallery is the section of the longhouse where most public and political activities take place. At the edge of the gallery is an area of raised sleeping platforms (*nangkat*) for bachelor males and male guests. Beyond the *nangkat* there is an unroofed drying platform (*pante*) where produce such as *padi* and pepper are dried. It is also the area where the circumcision would usually take place. In the harvesting season a hinged-roofed extension is often erected in this area in order to dry *padi* and store it before it is transferred to the granary (Schneider 1975: 213). On the basis of my observation the present Selako longhouse may be divided into three main parts with the additional part being the *dapur* or the kitchen. It is the part which adjoins the family room and located at the opposite end of the *nangkat*. It is