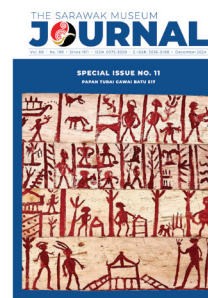




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THE ROLE OF IBAN WOMEN IN THE “GAWAI BATU RITUAL”: A STUDY OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Noria Tugang

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.
tnoria@unimas.my

ABSTRACT

“The Role of Iban Women in the “Gawai Batu Ritual”: A Study of Cultural Significance” examines the vital contributions of Iban women during the “Gawai Batu ritual”, a traditional ritual performed before planting paddy. This ritual, rooted in the Iban’s agricultural practices, symbolizes a communal offering for a bountiful harvest and reinforces cultural identity. The study highlights how women play crucial roles in various aspects of the ritual, from preparation to execution. They are responsible for gathering materials, preparing offerings, and performing specific rites that honour super natural beings and ancestral spirits. The “Gawai Batu” ritual is rooted in the Iban’s agricultural traditions, symbolizing gratitude to the spirits for past harvests and seeking more blessings for the upcoming planting season. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of the community with their land and spiritual beliefs. Iban women are central to the “Gawai Batu” ritual. Their involvement highlights their roles as nurturers and custodians of cultural practices, reinforcing their status within the community. This collective effort strengthens social ties and reinforces the communal identity of the Iban people. The Iban women are seen as mediators between the spiritual and physical worlds, performing offerings and rituals to honour super natural beings and ancestral spirits and seek their favour. This spiritual connection underscores the importance of Iban women in maintaining the cultural heritage and spiritual well-being of the community. Their continued participation in the “Gawai Batu” ritual is crucial for the survival of Iban cultural identity. This qualitative research explores the broader implications of this ritual for gender roles within Iban society, showcasing how women’s involvement in “Gawai Batu” empowers them and affirms their status as custodians of cultural heritage. Overall, the study emphasizes the “Gawai Batu” as not just an agricultural event but a significant cultural expression that reinforces the Iban community’s values and social structures.

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Keywords: cultural, identity, Iban woman, ritual, spiritual

INTRODUCTION

The Iban people worship extraordinary powers by holding oblique rituals and *gawai* rituals to communicate with gods or other extraordinary powers with the aim of asking for blessings from these gods. Ritual *gawai* can be understood as a method of traditional worship rituals of the Iban people to worship gods and other extraordinary powers that are carried out systematically, with full tradition, and full of rituals and attended by many people. In this research, the category of *Gawai Batu* rituals that exist in Iban society will be explained and it is an agricultural *gawai* ritual.

Gawai Batu is the festival of the rice planting season. Before planting rice, they believe that the spirit of the rice must be with them to get grace, sustenance and protection from their gods. Throughout this celebration, there are songs or mantra to worship the spirit which was recorded in *Pengap Gawai Batu* by Borneo Literature Bureau in 1968, Benedict Sandin, 1968. Throughout this celebration, the women will hold a ceremony with dances to worship *Sempulang Gana*, the God of the Land according to the beliefs of the Iban people and they believe that the planting of rice is a ritualised ceremony and abstinence. “*Gawai Batu*” is one of the many *Gawai* practices of the Ibans, the purpose of which is to safeguard their paddy farms, Gregory Mawar, 2013.

In this context, the *Gawai Batu* ritual in Iban society plays a very important role as a medium of communication between humans and gods or other extraordinary powers. This means that if the Iban people want to ask for a blessing from the gods, such as *Simpulang Gana* or *Pulang Gana*, they need to hold a *Gawai Batu* ritual as a marker of their identity so that they can be recognized by the gods or other extraordinary powers and all wishes or desires requested will be achieved, Benedict Sandin, 1980.

In Iban culture, the *Gawai Batu* ritual is among the rituals that can be seen through the ritual of communication between humans and supernatural powers. For the Iban people, the *Gawai Batu* ritual is a sacred symbol and the most important ritual like the oblique ritual and the *gawai* ritual in Iban society. According to the oral tradition of the Iban people, the *Gawai Batu* ritual is closely related to their cosmology and beliefs as a gift of gods and other extraordinary powers. The *Gawai Batu* ritual is believed to have elements of extraordinary power that are believed to help the lives of the Iban people become better and more perfect in future.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

Researcher has visited several libraries to get information from written or printed materials. Among them is the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Library. In addition, the researcher also referred to Sarawak Archive, Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) Sarawak. Among the materials referred to were theses/dissertations, books and journals. References to materials on the internet were also made.

Methods

This is an ethnographic study. The main method used for data or information collection is fieldwork. However, in addition to fieldwork, literature review and interview were also conducted to obtain additional information. In this research, the investigator uses an overall qualitative approach. Based on the use of a qualitative approach in an investigation, it can reveal an investigation thoroughly through the source of data or information acquisition from the fieldwork study phase. In this research, the researcher uses qualitative disclosure to obtain data from the informants about the scope studied on the topic of "The Role of Iban Women in the 'Gawai Batu Ritual': A Study of Cultural Significance". The qualitative approach in this research was appropriate for an aspect of one of the Iban community's cultures, relating to the ritual of rice planting. This is because a qualitative form of research is aimed at looking at the real approach to the environment studied for the purpose of understanding the internal perspective without being influenced by the views of the researcher. An enquiry that uses a qualitative approach does not require a fixed enquiry question except in the form of an enquiry objective. In addition, a research result that applies a qualitative approach can also affect the objectives that have been set before. The qualitative approach through the study phase of fieldwork (fieldwork for primary data/collection primary data) is very much in need of certain deductions, such as observation methods (ordinary observation or participatory observation), interviews with expert informants and analysis of research data related to this research. This investigation uses a qualitative approach in the form of exploratory research. This research was conducted to show the cultural aspects of tradition by the Iban community towards culture in the form of an invisible heritage, namely the *gawai batu* ritual. In this research, the researcher used several instruments to collect data, such as video recording equipment, a schedule of