NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND ECOLOGICAL WISDOM OF MAK UNGKAI MALAY STORY IN RIAU ISLANDS

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Abstract

The spirit of Mak Ungkai is begun to be forgotten and not widely known by the Malay people. The forbidden Malay traditions of the folklore are begun to fade. The society awareness and habits can be formed by inspiring and upholding of folklore as a local wisdom. Greimas’ Structuralism (Culler. 2004) and Garrard’s Ecocritics (2004) are two important theories dealing to this study. The study of narrative structure was used to dissect the spirit of the sea story. Eco-criticism was used to observe the interconnection between Malay folklore and the ecological wisdom. The coastal locals of Tanjung Kertang, Sebulang, Batam, Riau Islands were the informants. The results showed that the spirit of the sea “Mak Ungkai” story was inseparable from the local wisdom. The sea, as the central life of nature, was inseparable from human. The spirits of Mak Ungkai, Datuk Jerampang, and Awang Jangkung were not only as the antagonists but also as a part of nature. This story does not only present a frightening myth but it also shows how to maintain the balance of nature.

Keywords: Nature, ecological wisdom, Malay folklore, spirit of the sea.

INTRODUCTION

The Sebulang community in Batam has a story which contains the value of local wisdom, the legend of “The spirit of the Sea – Mak Ungkai”. Broadly, the legend of “Mak Ungkai” told the story that is feared by fishermen. Mak Ungkai was believed to be the guardian of the Malay coastal sea coast and often appeared among corals. Mak Ungkai could kidnap fishermen and destroy rocks. It was said that there was a migrant, namely Sheikh Johan, who was stranded on the beach and helped by the local community. To repay this assistance, Sheikh Johan provided the community with a spell that could drive away the Spirit of the Sea. In addition to the spell, the community must protect the marine ecosystem so that Mak Ungkai’s spirit would not disturb their lives anymore. Herewith, the community indirectly continued to maintain the sustainability of the marine ecosystem.

The facts that are happening now are contradictory. The sea condition is getting worse. Many fishermen catch fish by using bombs to destroy coral reefs (BatamPos, 2017). Central Agency on Statistics (2017) showed the number of Batam fishery sources has decreased in 2010 from 325,439 tons to 139,221 in 2014. Department of Fisheries and Marine Kepri stated that the Riau Islands marine ecosystem was increasingly critical (Eki, 2012). Besides the fishing systems which no longer heed the sustainability of the marine ecosystem, other factors that support the occurrence of degradation are environmental pollution and industrial waste (Jumali, 2017). In this increasingly modern era, people seem to be indifferent and want instant results. Not many people still hold the values of local wisdom. Even the latest generation was no longer familiar with the legend of the “The Spirit of Mak Ungkai” and the values of ecological wisdom contained in it. Therefore, this research was very important to do to restore the element of local wisdom as a guideline for the sake of maintaining harmony between humans and nature.

Ecocritical research is mostly carried out by international researchers otherwise it is still classified as new and rare in Indonesia. The first journal written by Bracke (2018) analyzed the novel “Waterland” written by Graham Swift’s in 1983. Sultzbach (2017) analyzed the work of phenomenal writers such as E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, and W. H. Auden with an ecocritical approach. The two studies have not linked literature and ecological wisdom. The main point that was important in this case, the researchers also raised the oral literature that is almost extinct as research data and relate it to ecological concepts. This research is classified as the theme of development and socio-cultural reinforcement with the topic of local wisdom research.
The narrative structure theory was first introduced by Greimas (Culler, 2014). According to Ratna (2013) narrative structure was used to determine the sequence of actions that have a direct impact on the story. Taum (2011) added that Greimas’s research objects were not limited to fables but also to myths, legends, and folklore. Greimas paid attention to the relations and forms that more universal then narrative grammar. In the case of story telling, it was done on the identification of text units’ sequences. A sequence is a group of sequential events that can become a set of stories that come together. In general, the sequence can be defined as a general way, a segment of text that forms the coherence of all stories.

Greimas in Culler (1996) suggested a narrative semiotic approach departed from an assumption that the surface structure in each story was derived from an actantial model. Actional models included the categorization of subjects in stories, objects, senders, helpers, and obstacles. These acts would become a role in their fictional actions if they have social or cultural qualities; the next step was the analysis of functional schemes. The functional model is divided into three: (1) Initial situation (2) transformation (3) Final situation in the story. The final stage in the concept of Greimas’s narrative structure was Isotopi. Isotopi tried to reveal the meaning behind the narrative of the story by considering the story’s acting and function. From this isotopy the researcher moved to use the literary ecocritical theory.

Literary ecocritical theory is an approach used to see the relationship between literature and the views of environment and culture. Glotfelty (1996) revealed that literary ecocritic focused on discussing literature and the environment. It means that the human environment is the basis for the emergence of literary works. Garrad (2004) also argued that literary ecocritical focused on how to imagine and describe the relationship between humans and the environment as a result of culture. Knowing nature in literature is a tendency to study which assumed that all nature was often present in literature in different forms.

Ecological wisdom is part of local wisdom that is inseparable from nature and the environment. Lestari (2018) revealed that the ecocritical could use the concept of local wisdom related with ecological environment in literary works. Local wisdom is a reference for people to carry out their lives in various social lives. Thus, ecological wisdom refers to the form of beliefs, knowledge, or custom that guide humans in life related to the ecological system.

METHODS

Faruk (2012) said that data collection methods and techniques are basically a set of methods or techniques that are an extension of the human senses because the aim is to collect empirical facts related to research problems. So this type of research is qualitative research because research data in the form of words and sentences from informants. The research location is in Tanjung Kertang village, Sebulang, Batam, Riau Islands.

Data sources for this research are primary data and secondary data. Primary data obtained by doing of observations and interviews. Observations will be carried out by observing and directly involved in the community activities, especially those related to research variables. Then the interview will be asked that have been prepared previously or in-depth interview method. This interview was conducted to obtain information about the object of research. In this case the interview is refered to the informants that has chosen before. They are the coastal local’s people in Tanjung Kertang. In collecting primary data, it is also equipped with recording. Any information obtained from observations and interviews will be recorded as well as possible. In addition to primary data, this study also used secondary data obtained from literature study result. This literature study included scientific writing about the object of study and other relevant reading sources such as journals, books, newspapers, magazines and articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted by interviewing five respondents as a representation of the Malay coastal community in Tanjung Kertang. The first respondent is Atuk Moyang Kang, the first person who stays and brings his family in Tanjung Colem village-part of Tanjung Kertang village, a small island around Batam. Atuk Moyang Kang is 107 years old. He told that Malay people in Tanjung Colem village was the migration from a small island in the south of Batam called by Abang Island. Abang Island itself is a small island with an area of 10 km2, where most of the residents are fishermen. Atuk Moyang Kang’s desired to open the new land and occupied the Colem village due to economic factors. Atuk Moyang Kang and family have lived in Tanjung Colem village for 70 years. Entering the age of 107 years, his health condition is not so strong for many activities and his memory had also started being blurred. From the interview result, Atuk Moyang Kang is quite cooperative and told the story of Mak Ungkai. He told the story with a
scary atmosphere. It could be caused he still hold and believe the myth behind the story. At least, Atuk Kang is the oldest person in Tanjung Colem who contributes to give information about this folklore.

The second respondent is the son-in-law of Atuk Moyang Kang named Mr. Buyung, 54 years old. He is also a Malay descendant of the third generation who settled in the Tanjung Kertang village. Mr. Buyung’s main livelihood is a fisherman for many years. As the impact of fish reduction, Mr. Buyung changes his profession becoming a wood laborer now. When the interview took place, Mr. Buyung told various fishing activities and the spirit of Mak Ungkai stories that he heard vaguely from his predecessor generations. As the third generation, Mr. Buyung is a fisherman who was quite influenced by technological developments. He is like the current generation that sailed with motor boats, used mobile phones to communicate in the sea, and not really care about the ancestor fishing traditions. From all these conditions, researchers can draw a red line related to the story of the spirit of Mak Ungkai obtained from an interview with Mr. Buyung.

The third respondent is Uan (a called for grandmother in Malay) Jenah Sarifah. Uan Jenah is 72 years old. Unlike the two respondents above, Uan Jenah is not stay in Tanjung Colem anymore but in another village called by Kampung Setokok 7 km from Tanjung Colem. Uan Jenah profession nowadays is a Malay traditional food vendor. When stayed in Tanjung Colem, her husband is a fisherman. After her husband died, she tried her fortune to the next village by Malay food vendor for visitors in Setokok beach. Although different profession, Uan Jenah still remember about Malay stories that told by old generations. As a Malay fisherman, her family was still upholding Malay traditions including many kinds of taboo from bahelak generation. The story of Mak Ungkai Spirit was also clearly remembered by her. Uan Jenah became the most cooperative and quite anxious resource person who knows much about the story and Malay traditions.

The fourth respondent is Atuk Muhammad Saleh Muharam, or called by Atuk Saleh. Atuk Saleh is 78 years old now. His profession is a traditional boat maker for fishermen and beach tourists. When he was young, his previous profession is a Malay coastal fisherman. He was very familiar with the ocean, understood a variety of traditional marine astronomy, and still adhered to customs and traditions of Malay people. When interviewing Atuk Saleh, he was very familiar with the Malay stories that were told generation after generation until finally they were submerged by time. Atuk Saleh said that the Malay story is more closely related to the myth. The younger generation is no longer relevant with this story so it is difficult to re-introduce the stories as a form of local wisdom, including the story of the spirit of Mak Ungkai. When told these myths, suddenly the atmosphere becomes horror and tense. The Spirit of Mak Ungkai became one of the dilemmas for fishermen who want to go to the sea. The description told by Atuk Saleh also has relevance to the previous stories although in narrative sequences this story is slightly different because the essence of the oral story will definitely be different from the plot. In general, it did not damage the essence plot of the story.

The fifth respondent by conducting interview with the Malay millennial generation named Kharisma. Kharisma is currently an 18-year-old student. Kharisma included the young generation who both of her parent is Malay native and profession as fishermen. Kharisma lives with her parents in the village of Tanjung Colem. When interviewing about the story of Mak Ungkai spirit, Kharisma knows the story fluently. Unlike the way of telling by previous respondents, Kharisma told the story is like telling the story of a sleeping beauty which is only fantasy. There is no sense of bitterness or the scary atmosphere when talking about the spirit of the sea. This fairness is seen by the condition of his parents as fishermen who have used technology better than before. The beach that was once filled with a gripping myth has turned into a tourist attraction filled with sparkling lights, villas, and resorts. But at least, Kharisma is a Malay generation who is still fortunate knowing the past stories from her predecessors.

In analyzing the storyline of Mak Ungkai Spirit, Researcher applied the theory of narrative structuralism by Greimas. The application of this theory will be made simpler by preceding the stages of storytelling analysis (sequences of stories), actantial patterns, functional schemes, three semantic shafts, and finally attracting isotopic by refining them with Ecological theory. From all information from respondent interview, there are several sequences of stories that can be taken in the following description:

**Sequence 1: Nature and Fishing Activities for Malay People**

Nature is an inseparable part of the Malay community. The sea was a main source for coastal communities in generation to generations. Greed started to arise from people who were not responsible for getting abundant results. Some people seek pesugihan by sacrificing their families and serving the sea coast watchman, the spirit of Mak Ungkai. There are also those who used various kinds of tools and
weapons which essentially damage the natural ecosystem. Some still maintain the traditions of fishing and not violate the taboos tradition, ninik pandai and religious scholars. Malay people have restrictions and prohibitions on what is recommended and avoided while at sea. They are not carrying metal objects and jewelry when fishing, told a swear words in the middle of the sea, getting back something left at home when you set foot on the sea, etc. If these traditions are violated, the spirit of Mak Ungkai will sink their ships and even kill the sailors. Every Malay people must make the sea as a friend and a part of life.

**Sequence 2: Wrath of the Spirits of the Sea**

When restrictions on the sea began to be violated and greed began to emerge, it would invite the wrath of Mak Ungkai. It is include greedy people who ask for Mak Ungkai help to get abundant fishing resource. The spirit of Mak Ungkai will charge their greed by asking for compensation in the form of sacrifice. If it is not fulfilled, it will also invite the anger of Mak Ungkai Spirit. It is include the anger towards Malay people in the coastal of the sea. Mak Ungkai likes to flip the rock. She throws fishermen with poisonous fish such as lepu, sembilang, dan utik jahan bersengat. Another spirit of the sea named Awang Jangkung who can issue fire and burn fishing pole.

**Sequence 3: The Spirit of the Sea Harassed Malay Coastal Communities**

Besides disturbing the fishermen when fishing, the Spirit of Mak Ungkai and Awang Jangkung also disturb the residents who live on the coast. The spirits of the sea terrorize the community and eat all the inhabitants' livestock. The spirits of the sea also emit a very unpleasant odor when terrorizing residents and fishermen on the beach.

**Sequence 4: Livelihood of Fishermen Disconnected Due to the Spirits of the Sea**

Terror that constantly harassed fishermen made people afraid to go out at night. The economy was cut off and livelihoods as fishermen were hampered. Coastal Malay communities were haunted by fear and anxiety at all times. Dogs barking every night, farm animals are slaughtered by the spirits of the sea.

**Sequence 5: Strangers Stranded**

When the atmosphere was tense, there was a ship that was stranded and a boat crew on the shore. The community was initially afraid but ventured because helping others was also an obligation. After deliberation, a community delegation was sent to appoint the stranded person.

**Sequence 6: Foreigners Assisted by Coastal Communities**

The stranger named Sheikh Johan. He was a pious person from a foreign country. The Malay coastal community took the sheikh and cared for him until his condition recovered.

**Sequence 7: Dilemma of the Coastal Community against the Spirit of Mak Ungkai**

Sheikh Johan felt the dilemma experienced by the coastal communities of Batam. The spirits of the sea terror continued to haunt every night. The livelihood as a fisherman was cut off; no one dared to leave the house when dark came. The community conveyed their complaints to Sheikh Johan to be given assistance.

**Sequence 8: Sheikh Johan Meet with the Spirit of Mak Ungkai**

Sheikh Johan finally wanted to help the coastal community. He went to the middle of the sea to look for the presence of the spirit of Mak Ungkai and Awang Jangkung.

**Sequence 9: Sheikh Johan Repelled the Spirit Who Guard the Coast**

Sheikh Johan recited a mantera to the spirit of the sea;

*Hei datuk jerampang nama raja dilaut* [Hey, Datuk Jerampan, the king of the sea]
*Si ungkai name emaknye merah padam tupai belari* [Mak Ungkai as the mother of spirit, red goes wild in squirrels]
*Si awang jangkun anaknye aku sampaikan* [Awang jangkung, the son of spirit, I'd told to him]
*Kau pindah berlari dari sini, aku nak same cari makan* [You go away from here, I’d like to find sustenance too here]
*Hei se kangkang sekolek semarelawe* [proverb]
Jangan kau lawe jangan kau dakwe jangan kau rosak jangan kau benase [Don’t fight, don’t judge, don’t break down don’t perish]
Undur kau dari sini, dekat kau jangan [Leave you from here, don’t you come]
Aku minta kau halau sekalian rakyat jentare [I ask you to stop all the Malay people]
Yang patah bertongkat yang bute dipimpin [The broken ones are upheld, the blind are led]
Masuk dalam bumbun raje sulaiman ini sebab engkau kuaseku [Enter the room of Solomon, because he is my master]
Kuase Allah bukan kateku! [God’s power, it is not my word!]

Sequence 10: The Spirit of the Sea Agreement with Coastal Communities
Sheikh Johan left the spirit of the sea. He gave once spells and community reminders, for not doing bad toward coastal in the middle of the sea. To not disturb each other while searching. To not disturb each other while at sea. Then Sheikh Johan returned to meet with residents again that the spirit of the sea would not come again to Batam beach.

Sequence 11: Sheikh Johan Left the Village and Gave a Briefing
Since that time, the spirit of the sea has never again disturbed the Batam community. Likewise Sheikh Johan has left the Malay coastal village of Batam. A briefing has been conveyed to the public not to be shirking to ask the help of the spirit of Mak Ungkai, Datuk Jerampang or Awang Jangkung. Do not say dirty when at sea. Nor does it damage existing ecosystems at sea such as coral reefs and sea purity. The fishermen also always slip the garlic or red chili in the boat as a deterrent when fishing. Sheikh Johan has also become sacred to the coastal fishing community of Batam.

Figure 1. Actional schema of the story sequence.

Society and nature are central subjects and recipients of Mak Ungkai folklore. The symmetrical relationship between humans and nature must remain balanced and protect one another. The basis of the balance is what makes the two remain harmonious. It is not to tease and protect each other because both of them essentially need each other. The story of Mak Ungkai is the story of the coastal Malay people who depend their life on the sea. Livelihood as a fisherman was the only way around at the time. When the relationship between humans and nature is cut off due to certain obstacles, the process of livelihood becomes stalled. The same is experienced by coastal communities. Beginning with acts that violate community norms, unscrupulous fishermen ask for the help of the spirit of the sea to get abundant wealth and income. When unable to pay victims, all people are affected by disaster. It made worse by the attitude of some people who damage the marine ecosystem that invited the sea guard becoming angry.

The sender in this case is the spirit of the sea terror on the coast of Batam. Society is not comfortable with the existing conditions. Every fisherman wanted to go to sea to be haunted by stories of ships sinking, burning, and even stung by poisonous fish. All the sea hell is angry with humans. Not only at sea, the spirit of the sea also terrorizes society by eating pets, giving off unpleasant odors, and an atmosphere that continues to be tense. The community’s livelihood was cut off and residents did not dare to leave the house when it was dark.

The helper in the narrative structure of the story is the arrival of strangers stranded along the coast of Batam. The stranger was hereafter known as Sheikh Johan. Sheikh Johan also later helped the
community to look for the spirit of the sea and drive them away. Sheikh Johan made an agreement with the spirit of the sea not to disturb and disturb each other. Sheikh Johan gave a briefing to residents to maintain the marine ecosystem and natural balance. Sheikh Johan became sacred to the Batam community. Mutual cooperation and decision making by deliberation are also helpers in this narrative. By deliberation the community is given the courage to send messengers to pick up and take strangers stranded on the beach. The nature of Malay society that likes to help when people are having difficulties is also a helper in the story sequence. This action led the community to help Syeik Johan.

The opponents in this matter are of course Mak Ungkai and their relatives. Terror for terror continued to be echoed by the spirit of the sea to the community which causes the community’s livelihood to be cut off. People who break out of tradition and violate the norm also become opponents, thus leading to the anger of the sea coast guard. Shyness by asking for the help of the spirit of the sea is also the basis for the arrival of the spirit of the sea terror. Likewise, the opponents included the irresponsible people who damage the natural ecosystem.

From all the story sequences, then isotopic is drawn or the semantic meaning behind the story. The story of Mak Ungkai spirit issued the people who came out of the tradition of preserving nature as part of life. The spirit of the sea myth not only offers fear and cruelty to sea legend but also a local wisdom in protecting nature. Asking for help from the spirit of the sea was clearly out of the norms of society and religion. Likewise, the hands of nosy people who damage the natural environment, littering, damaging coral reefs are the basis for Mak Ungkai’s sea attack to terrorize residents. With this myth, people will think twice about damaging the sea. Furthermore, not only physically activity, words or utterances can also pollute nature. Nature is filled with beauty. When saying a swear words on the sea is certainly against the principle of beauty. It is also a taboo that can bring the spirit of Mak Ungkai anger.

Malay people and the nature have a very strong relation reflected from the story of Mak Ungkai. The relationship is implied from the restrictions that are required with local wisdom in it. Another abstinence that may not be violated by the Malay people related to Mak Ungkai’s story is to bring metallic objects to the sea. It is reflected in Atuk Kang’s statement in the following quotation:

> Ada pantangan yang mesti di jage ketike melaut, janga membawak bende berlogam yang melekat di badon, bende berlogam semacam rantai, cincen dan subang. Kalau lelaki pulak tak boleh betendek atau besubang (hehe...), dan itu sangat di hindarkan. Kerane Mak Ungkai benci sangat bende tu dibawak dekat laot, cahaye silanye bise memancar dan mengusik keberadaan Mak Ungkai dekat laot. [There is restriction that must be obeyed when going fishing, do not bring metal jewelry in the body, metal jewelry such as chains, rings and earrings. If men are not allowed to use earrings. (Hehe...), and that is very much avoided. Because Mak Ungkai really hates the metal on the sea, the glare emanating from the metal can disturb Mak Ungkai’s existence and invite his anger.]

The quote above clearly showed a prohibition using jewelry when fishing. For Malay People it is a taboo thing, on the other hand researchers consider that there is an ecological wisdom that can be drawn from the myth. Precious objects are not appropriate to carry when at sea. Heavy physical activity will be very vulnerable for users to lose valuable objects. The vast sea is not easy to find lost objects and the result is only regret. Humans must be able to distinguish places and situations when carrying out any activity, including carrying jewelry when fishing.

Instead of prohibition, the nature and humans intimacy in an ecological framework can be seen from the advice when going to sea. It is illustrated in Atuk Kang’s statement below:

> Untuk menjage diri tak di kacau hantu laot, nelayan kene kera ingat pade yang kuase, hol lain semacam membawe nasi, bawang atau lade dekat sampan, menyisakan ae puteh dan membawe sediket kaen kuning. [To protect themselves from the chaotic sea ghosts, fishermen must remember God, other things such as bringing rice, onions or chilies near the boat, leaving behind white water and carrying a little yellow cloth.]

The quotation explained the traditions of Malay people when fishing. It is also inseparable from the existence of the spirit Mak Ungkai. In public perception, Mak Ungkai’s character is a troubling antagonistic character. Rice, onions, chilies, water and a piece of yellow cloth are antidotes so as not to be disturbed by Mak Ungkai. On the other hand, this recommendation actually also contains a preparation so that Malay people will not run out of supplies when fishing. Yellow fabric is the color
symbols that are often used by Malay people. Usually a yellow cloth is also worn to cover the gravestone. Both have a correlation, the yellow color on the grave as a marker so as not to mix with other stones, especially when it is dark. The yellow flag or a piece of yellow cloth can also be used as a marker when fishermen get lost in the middle of the sea. Not only the prohibition and recommendations, Mak Ungkai story also brings a lot of local wisdom to Malay people, especially related to ecological sustainability.

From the various analyzes above, starting from sequence, actantial, and functional narrative can be drawn isotopic so that the story of Mak Ungkai spirit is very much raised the ecological wisdom in it. “Sender” in the form of the spirit of Mak Ungkai, “receiver” as Fisherman, and “the object” is a nature showed that the relationship between humans and the spirit has significance to nature. Mak Ungkai as an antagonist turned out to be paradoxically presented as a representation of nature. Mak Ungkai is a guardian, occupant, and protecting of nature. And then, Humans is receiver and friends who must protect the nature. Determination of data in the form of community traditions also supported the existence that Mak Ungkai as a representation of nature and humans must maintain its balance.

CONCLUSION

The progress of the times and immigrant gradually make the oral folklore especially the Malay people of Batam coast increasingly degraded. Batam which was formerly reserved as an industrial city to Batam’s development plan as a tourism city puts culture into a secondary. One of them is folklore reflected from the spirit of Mak Ungkai story. From interviews conducted by researchers of five respondents in different generations, it showed that there was a certain degree of negativity towards the spiritual elements of oral literature contained in their local wisdom. The younger generation did not feel the vibrations behind the horror legend Mak Ungkai. Using Greimas’s narrative theory and Garrad’s ecocritics, the researchers transcribes the results of the interview and reconstructs the story through the sequences of the story line. Furthermore, researcher classified them in terms of the narrative’s structure and functional functions. Then, the researchers drew the semantic meaning behind the story which showed that the myth of the spirit of Mak Ungkai as the Malay coastal sea guard and clearly had a correlation with ecological wisdom. This ecological wisdom reflected from the maintaining of nature balances, protecting natural ecosystems, and making the sea as a part of life.

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