

# Local Wisdom of Land Clearing by the Society of Siak Malay in Past

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**Abstract**—The habit of land clearing by the community has always been the reason for the fires. In an effort to address such matter, the present study was carried out to examine how the habits of Malay society in Siak Regency prior to Indonesia's independence in 1945 in terms of land clearing. Conducted through empirical methods such as interviews with traditional leaders and perpetrators of land fires who were still alive at that time, the results obtained in this line of study showed that the process of land clearing and burning carried out by Malay society in Siak in the past did not damage nature. The ancient farmers burned the land without causing air pollution and without damaging the surroundings. The responsibility and respect of the landowner for his land by monitoring and limiting the fire on his land did not affect neighboring land. And hence, land clearing rules were not only in the form of customary norms but also followed by magical elements and therefore manmade fires can be controlled.

**Keywords:** *local wisdom, peat land, Siak*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Peat land fires in Indonesia, especially Riau province, have occurred since 1997 up to now [1]. The less obvious but equally devastating the impact of land fires has caused various losses, especially the loss of sources of biodiversity in the forests and peat lands of Indonesia [1]. Various causes of land fires to date, has always been a debate, both from academics to politicians. However, based on several facts it shows that human activities are mostly originated the main factors and causes of forest and peat land fires in Kalimantan and Sumatra not only due to natural factors but also human factors [2-4].

Some human activities that cause land fires include traditional shifting cultivation from local residents, forest clearing by HPH holders to structural causes that can be interpreted as a combination of poverty, development policies and governance that cause conflicts between customary law and positive state law [3]. Apart from companies, traditional communities are still significantly considered one of the causes of land fire, even in 2019, according to data from the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) there were approximately 50 indigenous peoples who have been criminalized [5].

In an effort to address such situation, local communities actually have traditional wisdom manifested in forms of a set of rules, knowledge, as well as the skills and values and ethics that govern the social order of the community that continues to live and develop from generation to generation. The concerned people who emerged from the local community who live, grow and wrestle with social, political, cultural, economic and environmental crisis, were studying failures to figure out practical solutions for their communities. They can share knowledge they received with the community without being traded [6]. And therefore, it is unlikely to result in full compliance that people who live and depend on these natural resources will damage their environment.

Riau Province, is one of the provinces in Sumatra which always experiences land fires. Such crucial condition is also affected by the topography of the peatland that it has, thus once it burns it will take a long time to extinguish because it is a deep peat area [7]. One of the deepest peatland ecosystems on the island of Sumatra, Riau in particular, is found in Giam Siak Kecil - Bukit Batu [8]. In relation to this, the current research attempts to figure out how the land clearing activities carried out by the ancient farmers, especially the Malay community in Siak Regency, Riau, who used to perform open cultivation, yet they cleared land without causing damage to the environment.

## II. METHODS

The current research-based paper uses quantitative research methods using primary data [9]. Through interviews with indigenous leaders, leaders in government and supported by secondary data through library studies in the form of journals, regulations and various research findings that discuss the local wisdom of indigenous peoples. This research is a historical research by limiting activities that took place before Indonesia's independence, on such basis that after Indonesia's independence, The Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura, Sultan Syarif Qasim declared submission and unity with the Indonesian government.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *The Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura*

Before merging with the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia, the Kingdom of Siak was a separate jurisdiction [10]. Up to 1945, the power of The Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura included Perbatinan Sejahleh, Perbatinan Perawang, Perbatinan sakai, Perbatinan Petalang, Perbatinan Tebing Tinggi, Perbatinan Merbau, Perbatinan Ransang, Kepenghuluan Siak Kecil, Kepenghuluan Siak Besar, Kepenghuluan Rempak dan Kepenghuluan Betung [11]. In carrying out the activities of his government, The King of Siak until 1945 was assisted by the Datuk (title of honours) of four tribes that governed the territory based on its territory [10,12]. The concerned four Datuk included as follows [11]:

- Datuk Lima Puluh with the title Sri Bijuangsa, who mastered tradition issues,
- Datuk Tanah Datar with the title Sri Paduka Raja, who mastered government matters,
- Datuk Pesisir with the title Sri Dewa Raja, who mastered domestic issues, and
- Datuk Kampar with the title Maha Raja Sri Wangsa, who controlled the overseas or colony area.

Each of these Datuk carried out their duties in accordance with the mandate of the king. The center of The Sultanate of Siak and the king's palace are located on the edge of the Siak river known as Siak Sri Indrapura. The position that is on the edge of this river, considering that the river is one of the transportation used by the community in the past [13].

During The Sultanate of Siak, royal income was obtained from export and import activities and even export goods excise. The forms of excise or tax that become income from Sultan Siak include taxes on terubuk fisheries, excise tax for passing foreigners, opium and salt debits and their stewardship, compulsory labor, compulsory deposits, money collection and trade in a number of parts of Siak especially in the west. In addition, other income also includes the right to buy candles as  $\frac{4}{5}$  even sometimes  $\frac{3}{4}$  collected in Siak; The right to surrender the exploitation of non-existent rivers to the ketia; granting permission to chop wood from hytan that is not managed; such as the surrender of plots of wild land to industrial companies to be exploited [14].

Other king's income is also obtained from tribute, such as elephant ivory, where every male elephant found, one ivory belongs to the king and another belongs to the inventors; Rhino horn, every rhino horn found must be offered to the Sultan and the discoverer will get a delivery. This rhinoceros horn was highly sought after at the time, because this rhinoceros horn was very effective in healing snakes wounds and bites; Guliga, is a kind of precious stone that is smooth and contained in the body of animals such as the bodies of bears, monkeys, snakes, boars and other animals; Gaharu is an art form, which is an irregular shape and can be shaped like animals such as birds, dogs, cats, and so forth; Cula Tupai, a hard squirrel penis that functions as an aphrodisiac at that time because it contains aphrodisiacum; Napoh fangs, are ring-shaped eyeballs in the

form of ringing animals which can be found in horn and deer animals; Musang Cabu, is a kind of white weasel and camphor which are included prohibited goods and in turns no one may collect this product without permission of the Sultan [14].

#### B. *Land Clearing Activities by Local Communities Before 1980 [15]*

Although The king of Siak has full control over all his territories, land clearing is carried out with permission from the local traditional leaders. Before land clearing, the next process is to hold a process of consultation among all residents and customary leaders first, this is important so that all parties know which land can be cleared and which land is determined as the area to be cleared until when the time of land clearing [10].

Based on the results of interviews with Mr. Said, Chairman of the LAMR Siak, that the process of land clearing in the past was carried out by: Deliberation in the village community environment; The village leader during the deliberation will direct which areas are allowed to be opened. Where land clearing can only be done by clearing land on the right side of pre-existing land or opening land starting from the top side of pre-existing land. Land clearing is always done in July - September which is considered as the right season to open land because it is summer.

At the time of land clearing, the community at that time was carried out by felling and cleansing, where waste from harvesting would be collected in the middle of the land or fields. Stacks from the harvest will be burned by looking at the direction of the wind. Land burning is awaited when the direction of the wind is directed in the opposite direction to the direction of the existing neighboring land. It is intended that at the time of burning will not lead to neighboring [10].

In the past, land clearing was carried out for farming or plantation business where the Malay society planted local plants. And thus if a field is abandoned and the people open a new land, then when they return to the field that was left behind then it will harvest the results, if not the land left behind will be left until the land becomes bushes and can be planted again because they assume the land has been back to fertile [10].

Land clearing at that time was not carried out on a large scale until the opening of the canal, as now Riau Province loses peatlands covering an area of 135,438 hectares per year [15]. Land clearing in the past was also particularly different from the current condition, the community performed land clearing without creating drainage canals and draining peatlands. The people openly conducted land clearing and clean the land surface only [16].

One interesting phenomenon under land clearing in the Malay community in the past, besides paying close attention to natural cues yet there is also a magical element. With regard to this issue, one witness called Mr. Wan Said stated that when he was young, his neighbor once conducted land clearing, yet due to the sunset the fire was still not extinguished and thus the neighbor also helped conducted such magical utterances and shook the fabric and the fire immediately went out.

Considering that in the past, the process of burning land shall be maintained and assisted by the land owner.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on results obtained in this line of research, land clearing carried out by Malay society in Siak Regency did not damage the environment. Local wisdoms were demonstrated by land fires on its surface, not drainage, controlling fires during burning, ensuring fire does not spread to neighboring land until the use of magic is forms of local wisdom. Most importantly, before 1980 period, land clearing was not carried out by creating and peat drainage canals. And therefore, if the burning of waste from land clearing in the past would not reach the bottom layer of the peat, it would only burn the waste and the surface of the peat.

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