

# The Procession and Meaning of Sengen Tradition in Gayo Lues Society

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**Abstract**—This study is about the Procession and Meaning of Sengen Tradition in Gayo Lues Society. This study try to reveal the tradition which is believed by Gayo Lues society as a sacred cultural heritage which is well known as the term Sengen. In Sengen tradition, a child who is mismatch with his/her parent is handled by giving that child to the relatives from his/her father or mother. The example of mismatch among other is when a child was born with face- down position and when the childs body is turned over, he/she will urinate, or when son or daughter is looks very much like his/her father or mother, it is worried that it will bring disaster or bad thing (often sick, often cry without reason, even it is worried that he/she will be died). The aim of this study is: (1) to describe the steps in Sengen process, (2) to describe the meaning of Sengen tradition in the culture of Gayo Lues society. The method in this study is qualitative descriptive by using interview technique. The location of study is in Putri Betung Sub-district, Gayo Lues Regency. The subject of study involve 15 people which consist of Custom leaders and people who ever hold Sengen and people who never hold Sengen. The result of study show that (1) The process of holding Sengen is done in Gayo Lues society in which birth parent provide various goods for *seserahan* which will be given together with the child to Sengen parent, and after the *seserahan* event had finished, that goods will be returned to birth parent. (2) Sengen tradition aims to guard the child in order to be safe, and avoid him/her from everything bad. The conclusion of this study is that the process of Sengen tradition held in Gayo Lues society as a cultural tradition which is passed for generations is held as a sacred cultural value, then Sengen tradition is held as the form of custom ritual by delegating a child to the relatives and it is expected that this procession of Sengen ritual can avoid the child and parent from disaster such as death and affliction which can occur to them.

**Keywords**—tradition; sengen; gayo tribe

## I. INTRODUCTION

Child is endowment and trust from Allah SWT and each parent become responsible for various aspects of their life including in education, health, affection, good protection and another aspects. A child certainly will resemble his/her parent. Various resemblance in child such as face, body proportion, character, and talent can be influenced by genetic factor. However, it's not guarantee one hundred percent that a child purely influenced by genetic factor. Because environmental factor also has big influence to child. Based on expert's observation, both face and body resemblance are influenced by parent's gene.

In general, Islam also recognize genetic law. As told by Al Imam Al Bukhari from Hadist Anas Radhiyallahu 'anhu, Rasullulah PBUH say, "as for child resemblance, if a man has sexual intercourse with a woman and his sperm ejected earlier than woman's sperm then the child will resemble his/her father, but if woman's sperm ejected earlier than man's sperm then the child will resemble his/her mother."

But it is different with the tradition in Gayo Lues Regency, namely Sengen tradition. Speaking about tradition, of course it cannot be separated from culture context. It is because this tradition contain meaning a course of actions tied to certain rules according to custom. A course of actions contained in that tradition is passed by one generation to next generation [1].

The condition of child which require sengen tradition to be done is that a baby who is predicted to has resemblance to his/her father or mother, so that baby can be given to relatives of his/her father and mother (uncle or aunt). It aims to guard him in order to be safe. There is belief that there is none who exactly similar with his/her parent because it will trigger competition. Based on belief that a daughter who very resemble her mother and a son who very resemble his father. It will result in mismatch, the two will easily quarrel and disagree because both have hot blood and the Gayo term say "*Porak Rayohe, gere sara bintang*" which means conflicting each other. To avoid that, Gayo people usually hold this sangen tradition. This ritual is done after the age of child is around one year old. Another reason why Gayo people hold this sengen tradition is because the child often sick, and because the child was born with face-down position. Usually the people believe that each child who was born with face-down position should be given to his/her uncle or aunt (the sibling of mother/father) because according to the belief, if the child is not given to them then the bad thing will happen, the child will always cry.

The persons who are involved in the implementation of this tradition usually from both sides, husband and wife agree both from birth parent and sengen parent. As for the stuffs which need to be prepared by birth parent during delegation are rice for child's food, a pair of clothes for child' clothes, a piece of long cloth used to carry the child, one glass and one plate for utensil, and baby's cradle. All those equipment's used to the child's needs when he/she stay with his/her adoption parent. But all those equipment's will be returned to birth parent because the child will remain stay with birth parent. Those are only requisite. After the procession of surrendering is finished

and all equipment's are taken by birth parent and the child remain taken care by birth parent, the child still call mother and father to sengen parent.

The procession of surrendering is done in the house of birth parent. In this process, there are no ceremony and ritual done specifically, only started with pray, birth mother carry the baby by using long cloth, and while carrying the baby the ritual is done in Gayo language or local language. The persons who should be present in that ritual are relatives from birth mother and relatives from sengen mother. In this ceremony the village officials do not interfere or play role, only some family members who are present. Concerning the status of parent whether adoptive parent or not, that child is not being adopted. The child only asked to has another parent. As for sengen parent's responsibility is to pay attention to that child even though he/she stay with birth parent.

The consequence for not doing this sengen tradition is that if something undesired happens then the local people will blame the birth parent because they do not comply the tradition which had been believed since long time. Whereas in governmental regulation No. 54 of 2007 about the process of adopting a child, it is said that: Adopted child is child who is surrendered from the environment of family, parent, legal caregiver, or the other person who is responsible to take care, educate and raise that child, to the environment of his/her adoptive parent based on adjudication.

Great Dictionary of Indonesia Language define "adopted child is another person's child who is taken (taken care) and legalized lawfully as own child." But differ with sengen tradition above, the child who resemble his/her mother or father should be surrendered and given to father and mother' relatives of that child, but not legally. The child remain stay with his/her birth parent. Because according to belief, if he/she does not given to his/her uncle or aunt, then something bad will happen to that child and his/her parent. Therefore, to avoid that, Gayo people usually do this sengen tradition.

Whereas in the surah of Al Qur'an, it had been clearly said that *"Wheres ever you maybe, death will overtake you even if you are in fortresses built up strong and high!" And if some good reaches them, they say, "This is from Allah," but if some evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you (Muhammad)." Say: "All things are from Allah," so what is wrong with these people that they fail to understand any word.*

According to the verse above, Allah who determine death and life of each human, whereas human who is the creature of Allah SWT does not have role in this case, and none who can change all the things which had been determined by Allah. Hence, the belief held by Gayo tribe toward sengen tradition will be contradicted with that verse above, while we all know that almost all people who are Gayo tribe are muslim.

## II. THEORETICAL

### A. Tradition

Tradition comprise the survival of past time in present time than merely show the fact that the present time derived from the past time. According to completed definition that tradition

is all material objects and ideas which are derived from the past but they are actually still exist now, has not been destroyed, ruined, discarded or forgotten. So the tradition here only heritage, what is actually remained from the past. Tradition is habit from ancestor in generations which still practiced in society. Since a long time ago, tradition has been existed and become habit practiced by society in the present time [2].

Hanafi define that "tradition is all heritages in the past which exists in ourselves and come into the culture prevailed now [3]. Hanafi view that tradition is not only historical heritage, but also contemporary problem with various levels. From this definition it can be said that everything humans do for generations from all aspects of their life which are the effort to ease human life can be named as "tradition" which means that it is become part of culture. Specially, tradition is translated as the process to inherit or continue the norms, custom, rules and belongings [4]. Tradition can be changed, raised, denied, and integrated with various kinds of human deed.

Specially, tradition which can generate society culture can be known from the embodiment of that tradition itself. According Koentjaraningrat, culture at least has three entities, namely:

- Culture entity as a complex of ideas, values, norms, rules, etc.
- Culture entity as a complex of activity of human's patterned behavior in society.
- Culture entity as the objects of human work.

Society is a group of people who have a common in culture, identity territorial, and interact in a structured social relation. Society inherit its past through:

- Tradition and custom (value, norm which regulate behavior and relation among individuals in group). Custom which is developed in a society should be obeyed by society members in that region. Custom as means to inherit the past sometimes can be delivered not exactly the same with what happen in the past but experience various changes in accord with era development. The past as basic to be developed and renewed continuously.
- Advice from ancestor is preserved by maintaining that advice through collective memory of society members and then passed orally from one generation to next generation.
- The role of older person (the leader of group who has more capability to conquer the nature) in society, for example: there is belief that the spirits should be maintained, venerated, and given what they like in the form of offerings.
- Make a reminder to all members of group in the form of painting and tools as survival tool and building or tomb. All of these can be inherited to next generation only by seeing it.

- The belief in spirits and souls of ancestors can include oral history because they left historical evidence in the forms of objects and building they make.

### *B. Sengen*

*Sengen* tradition is tradition which strongly believe that the birth of a son which very resemble his father will bring the problem or disaster because according to the belief from the past, it can cause disaster for his father. It is worried that he will die and that child can replace him and become next generation in family. Similarly, a daughter who very resemble her mother will cause something undesired, for example that child's mother will die soon. It is inevitable for Gayo people because this tradition had been done by earlier ancestor, so it become obligation for Gayo tribe itself.

*Sengen* tradition is very meaningful for Gayo people and until now this tradition still continued for generations, because according to Gayo Lues people, that tradition influence child safety and his/her family. That tradition can be done in order to respect their ancestor heritage. Because they believe that that tradition bring blessing and safety for the child as well as his/her parent and family. So *sengen* tradition in Gayo people is a sacred thing and continuously done. If the child has resemblance with his father then *sengen* process will be done. If something happen to the child and his/her family because of his/her parent do not do *sangen* tradition, then the local people will blame the child's parent for not doing *sengen* tradition.

### *C. Society*

Society means a system of ordered relations. Society can be refer to small society, for example Batak ethnic group in North Sumatra, or a broader society like nation state such as Indonesian society [5]. In such society, society members can interact each other because of cultural and religious factor.

The criteria which need to be met in order that a group can be said as society, namely [6]:

- The ability to survive exceeding individual's life span.
- Recruitment of all or part of members through reproduction.
- Loyalty to "a system of collective action."

Furthermore, Ralph Linton express that society is each group of human who had lived and cooperated for a long time, so they can self-organize and thinking about themselves in a social unity with certain boundaries [7]. Linton's argument is confirmed by Auguste Comte which explain that society is groups of living creature with new realities which develop in accord with its own laws and develop in accord with its own pattern [8]. Society can form unique characteristic for human, so without the existence of a group, humans are not able to do much in their life.

### *D. Gayo Tribe*

Gayo society is nation tribe who inhabit upland region of Gayo which is located between the plain of Barisan hills. Because located in area which varied topography and mountains make Gayo region called as Gayo Upland. The

Gayo upland consist of several regencies namely Central Aceh Regency, Bener Meriah Regency and Gayo Lues Regency. The Gayo people themselves more often call their origin region as Tanoh Gayo which means Gayo Land, because most of its inhabitant are Gayo people.

Nowadays the region inhabited by Gayo people comprise Central Aceh, Bener Meriah, Gayo Lues regencies, some parts of Southeast Aceh regency region, some small parts of East Aceh regency and the rest is Aceh Tamiang regency. All regions of this Gayo Land are united by a string of mountains and hills in the plain of Barisan Hill. Besides, they are united in their ancestor culture which are inherited for generations.

Gayo Lues then well-known as Negeri Seribu Bukit or The Land of A Thousand Hills. This name is popularized by Mohsa El Ramadan, a senior journalist who is The Head of Newspaper Redaction, Rajapost Banda Aceh and also editor of a book titled *Memadamkan Bara di atas Ladia Galaska*. The book which is written by Muhammad Ali Kasim Kemaladerna is the solution of conflict resolution for the building of Ladia Galaska road between government and environmental observer in Aceh.

## III. METHOD

This study use qualitative approach. Qualitative study is a display in the form of oral or written words observed by researcher, and the objects observed in detail in order to catch the meaning implied in its document or object [9]. Therefore, this approach is used in this study because this study want to reveal a complex meaning of a society culture.

Qualitative data is source from broad description and firm foundation and contain explanation about the processes occur in local scope [10]. With qualitative data, we can follow and understand the sequence of event chronologically, judge cause-effect in local people mindset, and obtain much and beneficial explanation. Data qualitative tend to guide us in obtaining the findings which are unexpected before and to form new theoretical frame. That data help researchers to step further from initial framework and presumption.

Descriptive method is study which aims to investigate a condition or another thing which had been mentioned, whose result is explained in the form of study report [9]. Descriptive study is the simplest study compared to another studies, because in this study, researcher do nothing toward object or area of study. In research term, researcher do not change, add, or manipulate object or area of study. In this study activity, researcher only take a picture of what happen in object or area which is studied, then explain what happen in the form of study report simply, just the way it is.

Subject or participant in this study is selected by using the criteria which is generally used in qualitative study. Subject of study is object, thing, or person who has data about object of study [10]. Therefore, subject of study has central position in study because data about phenomena, variable or problem studied are in the hand of subject of study. In this case, subject of study are people in Putri Betung Sub-District. The selection of subject in this study refer that the selection of subject in this study is done by purposive sampling [10]. It aims to select the



subject who are in the best position to provide information needed. Based on the aim of study, it is focused on society.

TABLE I. SUBJECT OF THE STUDY

No	Informant	Number
1.	Traditional Leader	5 persons
2.	The members of society who hold <i>Sengen</i> .	5 persons
3.	The members of society who do not hold <i>Sengen</i> .	5 persons

Total of subjects who are selected in this study are 15 participants. The study is conducted in Putri Batung Sub-district, Gayo Lues Regency, and Aceh Province. The selection of location of study is based in tradition done by society which is well-known as *sengen* tradition and Putri Batung Sub-district is sub-district which still preserve *sengen* tradition in society life.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

*Sengen* tradition in Gayo Lues society is part of local wisdom value which is still done until now by local people. Gayo tribe people are strongly believe that *sengen* procession in child who has resemblance to his parent (father) can bring disaster or can endanger the family members, so *sengen* tradition is very sacred for Gayo tribe people. There is perspective which develop in Gayo Lues people that if there is a child who resemble his parent (father) and *sangen* has not done for him and suddenly he is sick, then it always related to that belief. The belief in *sengen* tradition held by Gayo Lues people always inherited to each generation.

*Sengen* tradition is tradition which believe that a boy who resemble his father will bring problem or disaster because according to belief in the past, it is worried that that child will often sick and often cry without reason, even it is worried that he will die. Similarly in contrary, a girl who resemble her mother will cause something bad. It is inevitable for Gayo tribe because this tradition had been done by their ancestor, so it become obligation for Gayo people themselves. So to avoid that, Gayo people usually do *Sengen*, in which a child should be given or surrendered to father and mother's family, but not legally because the child remain taken care by his/her birth parent.

Tradition is habit or custom for generations passed by the ancestor which still practiced in society [2]. Since a long time, tradition has been existed and become habit which is practiced by society today. From that definition it can be concluded that everything done by human for generations from all aspects of their life which are the effort to ease human life can be said as "tradition" which means that it is become part of culture. It is confirmed by Koentjaraningrat that "in order that a culture can be supported by most citizens of a country then that culture should be unique and can become a pride for citizens who support that culture. It is necessary because a national culture should capable to give identity to its citizen [11].

The implementation of *sengen* tradition is done as following. *First*, the birth mother should prepare the goods for ceremony of surrendering (*seserahan*) which will be given to *sengen* parent, for example rice, coconut, *atos suse* (small

plaited mat), plate, glass, cup, and money voluntarily, which then in the time of surrendering this equipment's together with the child will be given *sengen* mother. *Second*, after the ceremony of surrendering is finished which is attended by family from birth parent (father and mother) and *sengen* parent (*sengen* father and mother) then the safety pray is read in order that the child is not sick and cry anymore. *Third*, the child together with surrendered goods are returned to birth parent. Because according to them, it is just a requisite and the child remain taken care by birth parent.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The implementation of *sengen* tradition procession is done by first, birth mother prepare the goods or equipment's which will be surrendered to *sengen* parent such as rice, plate, cradle, plaited mat, cup, long cloth, second, all those equipment's together with the child will be surrendered to *sengen* parent, and third, after the procession of surrendering is finished, all equipment's and the child will be returned to birth parent because children remain taken care by birth parent. In the *sengen* procession none of traditional leaders who are involved, the procession only attended by the family from birth parent and family of *sengen* parent. Even though some people do not believe in this *sengen* tradition, but they still do it because the local elder people instruct them to do that.

*Sengen* is child who is mismatch with birth parent because some following reason: boy or girl who very resemble their father or mother, with this resemblance can cause that child often sick, child often cry, even it is worried that he/she will die soon and because of this mismatch then the child should be surrendered to the family or relatives of father or mother.

The meaning of *sengen* tradition to guard the child in order to be safe and to avoid him from the bad things. *Sengen* tradition is intended to reduce the burden of life and to show love and affection to the child to save him/her and as responsibility toward the child. This *sengen* tradition is believed and proved as tradition which bring positive result, for example to bring safety for the child. Even though many people who do know the actual meaning of *sengen* but they continuously do that because they believe that by doing this *sengen* can avoid them from the bad thing. Nevertheless, they still believe that Allah who determine everything.

Tradition is something done since a long time that had been believed by local society. So they should involve traditional leaders in *sengen* procession. Traditional leaders should give more attention to the implementation of a tradition held in village. Parents should increase their curiosity toward the meaning of a tradition. It is expected that society can preserve this *sengen* tradition as long as it is not contradicted with Islamic law.

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