

RAPA'I DABOIH: ITS BACKGROUND HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH ACEH

Teuku Azhari ¹⁾

¹⁾ English Lecturer at Faculty of Engineering Universitas Malikussaleh, Aceh – Indonesia, tazhari@unimal.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The Indonesian is a nation that is very rich in culture. Rapa'i Daboih is one of the customs and cultures that developed in Acehnese society which demonstrates the magic of the immune dance and is played by 6-8 people in groups. This research is conducted to preserve the Rapa'i Daboih culture and pass it on to the younger generation since it is starting to lose its grip upon the eyes of the Acehnese people. This study aims to explore the background history and development of Rapa'i Daboih in Aceh, how it existed and has grown, up to the current era. The study brings about two main objectives; a) to understand the implementation and procedures of Rapa'i Daboih; b) to study the background history of Rapa'i Daboih and its early development in Aceh, especially in North Aceh. This study was conducted in Ulee Pulo dan Paloh Lada village, two villages in the North Aceh district. The study undertook a conventional qualitative approach method starting with an interview with actors in the subject and followed by observation and documentation of their activities in the field.

Keywords: *Rapa'i Daboih, Traditional Arts, Aceh.*

ABSTRAK

Indonesia merupakan bangsa yang sangat kaya akan budaya. *Rapa'i Daboih* merupakan salah satu adat dan budaya yang berkembang di masyarakat Aceh yang mempertunjukkan kesaktian tarian kebal, dan dimainkan oleh 6-8 orang secara berkelompok. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk melestarikan budaya *Rapa'i Daboih* dan mewariskannya kepada generasi muda, karena sudah mulai kehilangan cengkeramannya pada masyarakat Aceh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali latar belakang sejarah dan perkembangan *Rapa'i Daboih* di Aceh, asal muasal munculnya, dan perkembangannya hingga saat ini. Studi ini memiliki dua tujuan utama; a) memahami pelaksanaan dan prosedur *Rapa'i Daboih*; b) mempelajari latar belakang sejarah *Rapa'i Daboih* dan awal perkembangannya di Aceh, khususnya di Aceh Utara. Penelitian ini dilakukan di Desa Ulee Pulo dan Paloh Lada, dua desa di Kabupaten Aceh Utara. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode pendekatan kualitatif konvensional yang diawali dengan wawancara dengan aktor-aktor yang menjadi subjek penelitian dan dilanjutkan dengan observasi dan dokumentasi kegiatan mereka di lapangan.

Kata Kunci: *Rapa'i Daboih, Kesenian Tradisional, Aceh.*

PRELIMINARY

Indonesia is a nation that is very rich in culture. Consisting of 34 provinces, Indonesia is rich in variety and cultural variations. Aceh, one of the provinces, officially joined the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia on December 7th, 1965 (Ahmad, 2021) and is an integral part of this unitary state. This area has a population of 5.27 million people (5.45 million, Wikipedia versions) consists of the majority of the population being Muslim with several other religions such as Christianity, Protestantism, and Buddhism as minority religions.

One type of indigenous Acehnese culture is *Rapa'i Daboih*. *Rapa'i Daboih* is an amazing magic dance art. This art is a type of instrument in the form of a large tambourine (*Rapa'i*). *Rapa'i* is a kind of large tambourine that is beaten by hand and *Daboih* comes from the Arabic language, namely "*Daboih*" which is a kind of weapon and a pointed iron and round head, about half an inch long, and the shape is the size of a forefinger (Takari, 2015).

Initially, *Rapa'i* was born as an art form that was used to develop Islamic teachings. To speed up the process of Islamization, they demonstrate the art of *Rapa'i* to the public so that they are interested in hearing "*da'wah*" and stimulate the public to hear the music played by the *Rapa'i* crew. Based on the efforts made, Islam was accepted by the population and subsequently developed throughout the archipelago. That is in line with the entry of Islam into the Aceh region, namely to Samudra Pasai (Ediwar, 2016).

Background History

Rapa'i art is the cultural heritage and pride of the Acehnese people. According to Teuku Sulaiman (May 2014), the existence of *Rapa'i* membranes in Aceh has existed since the era of the Samudra Pasai kingdom which was brought by a group of followers of Sheikh Abdul Kadir Jailani from Arabia to spread Islam, starting from the Pereulak area to the Pase area (Miraza & Amri, 2017).

The composition of the *Rapa'i Daboih* is *Daboih* (debus crew) each of which holds a *Rapa'i*, then led by an expert called the "caliphate". This caliph had invulnerable knowledge, did not work with weapons, was an expert in iron *ma'rifat*, so that thanks to his incantations, sharp weapons stabbed into his body became bent or broken in two. If he occasionally suffers from puncture wounds, they can be healed immediately after he strokes the wound with the palm of his hand (Syahreza, 2013). Oftentimes, the performance was held at night as night entertainment.

During the spread of Islam in Aceh, *Rapa'i* played an important role. Concerning the musical instrument, Islam was introduced in two ways; with and without any musical

instrumentals. The congregations that have quite an influence on Aceh's arts and culture are the Naksabandiyah, Syatariah bound, and Ripa'iyah orders (Takari, 2015).

The Naksabandiyah Tariqa prioritizes beauty in a presentation in a kneeling sitting position. Rifa'iah Tariqat shows surrender to Allah through self-torture using sharp weapons while remembrance pounding oneself, stabbing oneself, aimed at the body while doing remembrance but not injuring oneself. Things like this have reached the level of remembrance of Fanabillah, meaning that all nature no longer exists except Allah. That is what Debus says has reached its culmination point (Dwi, 2012).

Early Establishment

Sheikh Ahmad Rifa'i, as stated in various resources, was one of the followers of the group of Sheikh Abdul Kadir Jailani from India who developed the Kadiriyah order which was brought by his followers to the Pasee country and introduced *Rapa'i* in Aceh (Takari, 2015). During his preaching, he would bring and beat *Rapa'i* to gather the people of Aceh. People who do not know the name of the musical instrument call it *Rapa'i*, named after the syeikh. Over time, the instrument was then called *Rapa'i* (Syahreza, 2013).

Another opinion stated that *Rapa'i* was brought by Sheikh Abdul Kadir Jailani from Baghdad (Iraq), then brought by his followers to Aceh around 900 AD. His followers spread the art of *Rapa'i* at that time as well as instilling Islamic teachings in the Acehnese people. Because the art of *Rapa'i* is interesting and the people of Aceh can easily digest the messages conveyed in this art, it makes the people of Aceh feel interested and at the same time make *Rapa'i* a traditional art. The method used by followers of Sheikh Abdul Kadir Jailani in broadcasting and developing Islam is by sounding *Rapa'i* (Verulitasari & Cahyono, 2016).

Sheikh Abdul Kadir Djailani and his eleven followers are considered to be the first to bring and introduce *Rapa'i*. It was not clear whether these followers came from Baghdad, as Sheikh Abdul Kadir Djailani, or whether they were the local Acehnese community by using *Rapa'i* as a supporter of these activities (Marzuki, 2014; Nurdin, 2016). *Rapa'i* at that time was used as an attraction to gather the masses through the rhythmic patterns it produced. After the masses have gathered, *Rapa'i* is still played by incorporating elements of the text of the holy verses of the Qur'an (Syafwan, 2014). Another opinion says that Sheikh Abdul Khadir Djailani gave the name of the instrument with *Rapa'i*. Snouck Hurgronje (1997: 189) writes "Acehnese... call... *Rapa'i* (from *Rifa'i*), for tambourine - an instrument used in games and remembrance" (Nazmudin, 2013).

However, as time by and technology emerges, traditional art, including *Rapa'i Daboih* is starting to lose its grip upon the eyes of its beholder, the Acehnese people. A study on the subject is imperative to re-establish the past glorious position the art upheld and to re-introduce the art back to its society as a form of cultural reproduction, or a process to maintain and preserve the culture done by the people as part of their indigenous culture identity (Andika & Sari, 2019). This study aims at exploring the background history and development of *Rapa'i Daboih* in Aceh, how it existed and has grown, up to the current era. The study brings about two main objectives: a) to understand the implementation and procedures of *Rapa'i Daboih*; b) to study the background history of *Rapa'i Daboih* and its early development in Aceh, especially in North Aceh.

This study is very significant as to know and understand our own folk music and art. Traditional art worths our attention as it comes with the background history of one community and race and should be maintained and passed down from one generation to another. This study also gives slight hope to the artisan showing that someone still cares for the art and not just for show and performance only. This study brings light to the maintenance and conservation from extinction.

This study was conducted in Ulee Pulo dan Paloh Lada village, two villages in the North Aceh district. As *Rapa'i* is widespread in Aceh in its various forms, such as *Rapa'i Daboih*, the study should expand its scope of the area to have a better and more comprehensive outlook of the problem. Additionally, the single data collecting procedure applied requires completion and strengthening for a more valid output. The study undertook a conventional qualitative approach method starting with an interview with actors in the subject and followed by observation and documentation of their activities in the field.

Literature Review

Culture is a thought, custom, or mind grammatically. The meaning of culture is derived from the word culture which tends to refer to the way of human thought. From this understanding, it is clear that culture is a perspective or way of thinking of the Indonesian people that have been formed since time immemorial, and has been used by the Indonesian people in the nation and state (Teng, 2017).

Music in this genre is also often called traditional music. Although the term is usually only descriptive, in some cases people use it as the name of a genre. For example, the Grammy Award previously used the terms "traditional music" and "traditional folk" for folk music that is not contemporary. Folk music may include most indigenous music. As its birth was closely related to religion, *Rapa'i* uses religious attribution and symbols in its formats. Compliment on *Rapa'i's*

dance shows that in the *Rapa'i* Aceh, the compliment is generally addressed to God. That is because the Acehnese culture puts forward the values of Islam so that compliment as praise that exists is only aimed at God (Liyana, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted in Ulee Pulo dan Paloh Lada village. Location selection was based on the availability of actors in the study field. Based on the initial survey, the two villages have *Rapa'i Daboih* artists as well as performers. The type of research used by the researcher in qualitative research with a thematic analysis approach. The researcher gathered information and derived meaning from a theme of conversation. This type of qualitative research itself is descriptive research and uses analysis, thematic analysis in this sense, to draw meaningful information from the source (Koentjaraningrat, 1993: 89). This study using, qualitative research methods are conducted by visiting research locations, which aims to provide a direct description of the object being researched. Researchers collected data by conducting interviews, documentation, observation, and literature studies so that the data and information taken can be trusted and proven.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews were conducted with actors and key people involving in *Rapa'i Daboih* art. To answer the research questions, interviews were conducted on a specific target to reveal the fact and truth and answer the research questions. To understand the implementation and procedures of *Rapa'i Daboih*, researchers interviewed with a reputable *Rapa'i Daboih* player in the North Aceh area named Herman. In an interview with Mr. Herman, we asked about how to play *Rapa'i Daboih* and the procedure for its implementation.

According to Herman, *Rapa'i* art is closely related to the *Rifa'iah* congregation. This tradition was brought by Sekh Ahmad Bin Ahsan Al-Ripa'i in the XI century. This is where the name *Rapa'i* was taken. The tool used to beat oneself is the size of a coconut shell, made of wood, while the tool used to pierce the limbs uses a triangular iron with a pointed tip. In a similar tone, Manan (2014) noted that this art was later introduced from village to village throughout Aceh.

Rapa'i Daboih or better known as *Daboih* is an anti-mainstream art performance known in Aceh. The combined music+performance brings out the element of vulnerability and entertainment to the public eye. The art uses typical percussion instruments of Aceh and sharp iron objects like knives, daggers, and swords. In Aceh, *Rapa'i* was first known in the Pasee area and was called *Rapa'i* debus around the XIII century. The people of Awe village changed their name to *Rapa'i*

Pasee by increasing the size of *Rapa'i Daboih* to produce a louder sound, "bigger *Rapa'i* produces louder sound" he claimed. Similarly, Ediwar (2016) noted that after the 2004 Aceh tsunami disaster, *Rapa'i* developed rapidly and became a top priority art in Aceh. This has proven that it has an impact on people's lives. Likewise, he also discussed the growing size of *Rapa'i* from 30-57 cm to 63-78 cm which was lead by an assumption that it will produce brasher acoustic sound should the size increase. This perception has led to the use of bigger size *Rapa'i*, especially nowadays.

In its development, this tool also changed by being given a skin, from a small size, a larger size was made and it was called *Rapa'i Uroh* which means a *Rapa'i* match between two groups. The winner is the one who has a loud voice and has a high tone (Miraza & Amri, 2017). Herman, later also approved by Rabial, further agreed on the origin of *Rapa'i*, namely *Rapa'i Uroh*, which later gave birth to *Rapa'i Zikir*, *Rapa'i Saman*, *Rapa'i Geleng*, *Rapa'i Hapit*, *Rapa'i Lagee*, *Rapa'i Ang Gok*, *Rapa'i Siddik/Sedat*, *Rapa'i Bruek/Tempurung* and *Rapa'i Ratoh/Ratap*. From *Rapa'i Tuha* and *Rapa'i Debus* were born *Rapa'i Pulot*, *Rapa'i Kaoy* (Makin, 2016), *Nazar*, *Rapa'i Uroh Duek/Uroh Sat* and so on (Nazmudin, 2013).

According to Herman *Rapa'i Uroh* or *Rapa'i Pasee* is considered the oldest *Rapa'i* in Aceh. The technique of playing it is a horse technique because of its large size and hanging, hit with maximum power. *Rapa'i Uroh* is now in the East Aceh area of Simpang Ulim, Dewantara District, North Aceh. The *Rapa'i Uroh* performance is held after the *Isha* prayer until the time for the dawn prayer with a high buzzing sound from the blows.

Around 4-6 people hit the *Rapa'i* to start the running of the performance. Later, two or more performers will come forward to the center of the circle and perform *Daboih's* attractions. These can be in the form of sticking sharp objects into the body firmly, cutting out one's arm, legs, or other parts of the body, and having one performer cut another, of course with no one getting hurt. They will do these acts while dancing, and moving around the circle in front of the audience to mesmerize and caught their attention. Oftentimes, spectators will be amazed and awed by the acts and stunts pulled by the performers.

Like some other types of art, this rather dangerous art has its specific procedures. *Aneuk Daboih* (person who hits the drum) starts by hitting the drum as a signal that the performance was about to start. The *Aneuk Daboih* hitting the *Rapa'i* simultaneously in a sitting position with shoulder blades or forming tight circles. When the *Rapa'i* began to be hit, the caliph rose to his feet, then advanced to the midst of the players while doing dance movements diligently to the rhythm of the *Rapa'i* (Karina, 2014). Holding the *Daboih* iron in his hand, the caliph jumped up

and down to the rhythm of the *Rapa'i* while saying prayers with a loud bowing voice. And when the sound of the *Rapa'i* roars, the caliph is like a trance who stomps his body to the rhythm of the *Rapa'i*. So at that time, starting with his supernatural powers, he stabbed himself, either stabbing his thigh, stomach, or other body parts while jumping (Takari, 2016).

In addition, *Rencong* is also often used as a tool in this art. Players who use *Rencong* will stab the *Rencong* firmly into their bodies. Often this *Rencong* will bend and even break when stabbed into the caliph's body. The caliph also performed other attractions, such as wrapping a hot iron chain around his neck, body, or waist, hitting himself blindly, *bloh apui* (dancing on coals of fire), or throwing a large stone on his head, and other attractions that made the body caliph was spared from harm (Quthni, 2014).

The historical background of *Rapa'i Daboih* and its early development in Aceh was elaborated in an interview with the second respondent in Ulee Pulo village, Mr. Abu Bakar, a caliph *Rapa'i Daboih* performance. In addition, he was also an elder (expert) in *Rapa'i Daboih*. Interview with Mr. Abu Bakar about the origins of *Rapa'i Daboih* and its development in Aceh.

According to Abu Bakr, the word *Uroh* is defined as a match, ten against ten and thirty against thirty to fifty from *Uroh*. In the past, the Acehnese people used to connect with families in several ways, for example, in the rice field season when threshing rice, it was done by working together and by collecting people. People would answer the call and come with preparation and slaughter animal for their food. The crowd came with their supplies or slaughter goats (Takari, 2016). Likewise with the art of *Rapa'i Uroh* in its performances aimed at friendship. One group in an area is invited by another area to establish kinship, the host entertains by providing food.

Abu Bakar also explained that *Rapa'i Daboih* is very popular among the elderly, but not so much among teenagers. He claimed that current adolescents are less concerned with *Rapa'i Daboih* culture. They prefer modern culture such as breakdancing which according to him “has no meaning”. Herman corroborated the idea saying that today's youth prefer western customs over their own. “We often notice during the *Rapa'i Daboih* show, majority of attendants were elderly and not so many from the young generation. That is very unfortunate especially if one day the *Rapa'i Daboih* culture will no longer have fans, even the most unfortunate one is that there will be no successor from the adept caliph, they can only see *Rapa'i* culture through social networks such as Youtube” Abu Bakar added. He was worried that this wonderful tradition fades away and be replaced by new and modern inventions, games, and gadgets.

Before the modern mass media boom in Aceh, *Rapa'i* played a role as a means of supporting the delivery of religious conceptions through its sound that aroused the audience and listeners to

witness the *Rapa'i* game first hand, so that finally *Rapa'i* was used as a propaganda medium. Over time, *Rapa'i* has changed from being a medium of Islamic *da'wah* to entertainment in traditional ceremonies or ceremonies related to the celebration of major holidays, such as the Islamic New Year, the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, and so on (Hasibuan, 2016).

The current situation and development of new gadgets and games, including online gambling, has placed *Rapa'i Daboih* in a much dangerous situation. That phenomenon also occurs in various other cultures in Indonesia. It is becoming less attractive for many young teenagers, let alone to study it. Practitioners of this tradition have faced lack of request and offer for performance and only perform seasonally. This gives a negative impact on them both emotionally and financially. The less they were invited for a show, the fewer people will see them and the less money they will earn to survive.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Rapa'i Daboih is one of the customs and cultures that developed in Acehnese society which demonstrates the magic of the immune dance. *Rapa'i Daboih* is played by 6-8 people in groups forming a circle, in demonstrating it usually the caliph takes off his clothes so as to prove to those who see that the culture of *Rapa'i Daboih* shows the magic of immunity, in its implementation, it is usually done at night with the sound of *Daboih* tang up to several meters. This is one of the very unique traditions of Acehnese and deserves better attention towards its survival and conservation. Current development and modern era has sided *Rapa'i Daboih* and made it less attractive compares to many other new trends such as gadget, games, and other handphone applications.

By doing this research, researchers and the community, especially the North Aceh region, are to continue to preserve the *Rapa'i Daboih* culture and pass it on to the younger generation. A symbol of pride for the Aceh people where we know that the *Rapa'i Daboih* culture is very rarely liked by Aceh teenagers even though *Rapa'i* culture is very important among the Aceh people. Government need also to play its role by providing more space for performance and show. *Rapa'i Daboih*, along with other local arts, should receive more space in many government events. Ministries conducting events should consider inviting the *Rapa'i Daboih* team as part of their performers. People need to see more of these arts in public to attract more attention they genuinely deserve. Local artisans need also be organized and promoted. There should be a local art center where local artists gather, perform and teach the arts to new generations. That is crucial to help preserve our art for future generations.

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