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BISSU: ANCIENT BUGIS PRIEST
(Perspective On The Influence Of Hindu Civilization In Bugis Land)

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Abstract

This study discusses the Bugis or Bissu priests in South Sulawesi Province. The Bugis people's belief in bissu has been written since ancient times and has even been documented in the Lontara I La Galigo. In general, Bissu is a man but looks like and dressed up like a woman or in the Bugis language; it is called Calabai. During the heyday of the kingdoms in South Sulawesi, a Bissu had a crucial position in traditional ritual activities and other sectors such as medicine, as a fortune teller, to determine good days and a royal advisor. They are believed as the bridge between humans and gods or ancestral spirits through their language called Torilangi. Along with the times, the existence of Bissu in South Sulawesi began to disappear because they were considered to be carrying out idolatrous activities. There is no more special attention given by the government to their survival. So that many Bissu has switched professions to survive, such as being a bridal make-up, working on rice fields and gardens as well as taking part in regional tourism activities through the Magiri attractions they display.

Keywords: Bissu, Bugis, Hindu Civilization, I La Galigo, Priest, Tradition

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bugis tribe in South Sulawesi is one of the tribes that have various traditions that color their lives, ranging from rituals to convey gratitude, ceremonies related to the life cycle to rituals to reject reinforcements. This is based on the belief of the Bugis community in ancestral traditions or what is called Toriolong (Nurfadilah, 2019: 15). In general, the rituals of the Bugis tribe are aimed at three things, namely to the gods, the ancestors, and subtle-creatures. The ceremony is led by a Bugis priest or what is known as *Bissu*. In the ancient Bugis era, a *Bissu* had a very important position and role in a kingdom, not only playing a role in the field of rituals and customs but covering all aspects of life such as medicine, fortune-telling, bridal make-up, and determining a good day.

Anwar (2007: 68) states that *Bissu* are religious leaders in the teachings of traditional beliefs that are highly respected. During the heyday of the Luwu Kingdom and the Bugis-Makassar kingdoms, a bishop received special treatment by the Kingdom. They are not only in charge of carrying out rituals in a kingdom but also serving as advisors to the king. According to Gilbert Albert Hamonic, the beliefs held by *Bissu* were originally born from the people's beliefs at the beginning of the formation of the Kingdom in Luwu. This belief then developed and was metamorphosed by the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism which was later accepted by the aristocracy in Luwu (Anwar, 2007: 69). Meanwhile, B.F Matthes stated that *Bissu* is a male-female priest which the Bugis community calls Calabai (Anwar, 2007: 68).

Bissu comes from the word Bessi (Bugis) which means clean. *Bissu* is considered clean because it is not bleeding, pure (not dirty), does not have breasts, and does not have menstruation. In I La Galigo, it is said that one of the Batara Guru's descendants (Datu / pajung Luwu 1) named We Tenriabeng (Sawerigading's twin

brother) also became a *bissu*. According to Hooykaas in Rahman (2006: 47) in ancient times, besides serving as religious priests (clergy), *Bissu* were also believed to look after the king's sons and daughters, especially when they were bathing or changing clothes. Physically, a *Bissu* has a male body but looks like a woman or in the Bugis language it is called *Calabai* (Makkulau, 2008: 22).

According to Fachruddin in Rahman (2006: 47) the term *Bissu* is similar to the term Monk in Buddhism. However, in later developments the meaning of *Bissu* was different from monks in Buddhism. This proves the existence of a less profound influence of Buddhism in South Sulawesi. In general, a *Bissu* is a man but looks like a woman. According to the beliefs of the Bugis people, such physical appearance is intended to make them escape the biological demands of the opposite sex. Thus, the *Bissu* relationship with the gods will never be cut off.

The existence of *Bissu* in South Sulawesi is certainly a very interesting thing to study. Not only from the role of *Bissu* which was very important in the past but also the activities and teaching concepts understood by a *Bissu* have in common with the teachings of Sanatana Dharma. This can be seen from the mention of God using the words *Dewata*, *Bhatara*, and *Dewata SeuwaE* so that this study aims to understand and determine the influence of Hindu Dharma civilization in the archipelago, especially in the area of South Sulawesi.

II. METHOD

This research is qualitative research with the research location in South Sulawesi. Sources of data from this study were obtained from field studies and literature studies. Meanwhile, the theory used in this research is Role Theory and Existence Theory. Role theory originates from psychology, sociology, and

anthropology. In the three sciences, the term "role" is taken from the world of theater. In theater, an actor must play a certain character and in his position as a character, he is expected to behave in a certain way. Bilton as quoted in Edy Suhardono stated that social roles are similar to the roles played by an actor, meaning that people who have certain positions or statuses in society are expected to behave in certain predictable ways as if several "texts" (scripts) have been prepared for them (Suhardono, 2016: 8). In this study, Role Theory is used as a basis for thinking in discussing the role of a *Bissu* at present and the role of *Bissu* in the kingdom. Whereas the Existence Theory used in this study is Kirkegaard's Theory of Existence which states that existence is a decision that humans dare to make to determine their life and accept the consequences that humans have taken (Bagus, 1996: 187). This theory is used as a basis for thinking in discussing the existence of *Bissu* in *Lontara I La Galigo* and the existence of *Bissu* in the Bugis community.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Bissu in Lontara I La Galigo

Bugis history excavations can be traced through *Lontara* and ancient Bugis manuscripts. *Lontara* can cover all kinds of writing using Bugis letters or what is called "*Urupu Sulapa Eppa*". One of the *Lontara* that reveals a lot about ancient Bugis culture is *Lontara I La Galigo*. Among the Bugis people, *Lontara I La Galigo* is considered a very sacred book. In it contains many episodes of supernatural stories and even this book is believed to be a spell to cure disease, reject reinforcements, salvation events, and so on (Anwar, 2007: 403).

Lontara I La Galigo is said to be the longest *Lontar* in the world exceeding the Mahābhārata and Ramayana texts. The length of this manuscript is due to a large number of characters told and each character has a very important position and is a descendant of gods in the upper world or *Boting Langiq* and in the underworld or *Buriq Liu* (Rahman, 2006: 4). In this *Lontara* also tells the story of the leader of the Bugis religious ritual, namely *Bissu*.

In the manuscript *Sure 'La Galigo* it is told that the first *bissu* on earth was named Lae-Lae, which was passed down along with *Batara Guru* (Makkulau, 2008: 2). One thing that is very interesting in the discussion of *Lontara I La Galigo* is the presence of *Bhatara Guru*, who is then considered the ancestor of the Bugis tribe. In *Lontara I La Galigo* it is also explained about the presence of a *Bissu* on Earth who is descended from the upper world or *Torilangi* named We Sawammega and his entourage as the leader of the ceremonies on Earth. This can be seen in *I La Galigo* which has been rewritten by Arung Pancana Toa (2000: 48-49), namely:

*Mawasungngè langiq nabissu
Liliqna Luwuq, limpona Wareq,
Napottoddang ngi parèwa bissu
ripasakkeqna ri baruqae
Cèraq uasè tebbang arawaq,
Lè musuro I lè massaliweng ri
minangaè*

Translate:

The possessed then danced the *Bissu*. In the area around Luwuq and around Wareq, so that they would bring their *Bissu* to the arena to commemorate the ax cutting Arawaq wood.

*Bèlo I awoq taleq menrawè sittaq
passili*

*Talleppeq ada madècèng to pa
Manurungngè
Natijjang to na To Tenrioddang*

Translate:

Decorating bamboo, sowing menrawè and sprinkling holy water has not finished the Manurungngè ceremony then banking To Tenrioddang.

From this, it is very clear about the role of a bissu in traditional ceremonial activities. The role of Bissu Bugis has similarities with priests who are in other religions, especially a priest in Hinduism. From the quotation above, it is also seen about the ceremonial means performed by bissu, namely in the form of water which is said to be "holy water". In Hinduism, holy water or *tīrthā* is a very important means of the ceremony as a means of cleansing. Water is a means of purifying, an element that provides prosperity, the flow of life that can be crossed in self-realization (Titib, 2009: 97).

In traditional ritual activities led by bissu cannot be separated from water symbols and fire symbols. Even in the Mapalili traditional ceremony on the first day, a process of taking holy water from the river will be carried out which will later be used as a means of carrying out traditional ceremonies. In Hinduism, water sources or what is called *Patīrthan* are places to get holy water. These concepts can be estimated as one of the forms of the Sanatana Dharma civilization that once developed in the archipelago. This is because these concepts are not found in the teachings of other religions.

Bissu in Bugis Rituals

In the kingdom era, a bissu was considered a central figure in a society, even a ceremony could be said to be unsuccessful without the presence of a bissu (Surpi, 2016: 47). This is not only due to the royal tradition which requires bissu as the leader of the ceremony, but the Bugis

people in ancient times believed that bissu could communicate with the gods (the world above) and their ancestors. A bissu is believed to have the ability to make contact with past lives as well as future lives, bissu also can practice medicine or in the Bugis language, it is called Sarno (shaman), which is enough to recite mantras and prayers accompanied by puffs of frankincense, a person is believed to be able to recover from an illness.

Makkulau (2008: 30) states that bissu is also believed to have the ability to predict, namely the ability to see good days to start a job or to determine bad days. Also, a bissu is believed to be the intermediary for the organizer of the offering ceremony (offerings) as an expression of gratitude for the blessings received by humans. One of the important ceremonies that must involve a bissu is the Mapalili traditional ceremony or traditional ceremony which aims to ask the blessings of the gods when starting work in the fields. Mapalili is a form of tradition that has been carried out for a long time and is still being carried out especially by the people in Segeri District, Pangkep Regency. During the kingdom era in South Sulawesi, the Mapalili traditional ceremony would involve 40 bissu or what is known as Bissu PattappuloE and hold for 40 days and 40 nights with a very festive and wise ritual (Anwar, 2007: 74). Theological aspects can also be understood from various bugis rites related to the existence of the bissu. Theological concepts reflects in several aspects, such as ritual forms, text contents, manuscripts, and even architecture. Explaining theology of the Hindu Nusantara requires the study of many elements such as the existence of manuscripts, inscriptions, texts, and temple structures that will be directly related to the theological concepts (Surpi, 2020:114).



Picture 1. The bissu during the Mapalili traditional ceremony

Source:

<https://warisanbudaya.kemdikbud.go.id>

In the picture, that the Bissu carrying out a traditional Mapalili ceremony. From the picture above, it can be seen that the ceremony was carried out very lively with the main means in the form of rice. Apart from being a form of gratitude, the Mapalili traditional ceremony is also a form of respect for Sanggiang Serri. In the epic *I La Galigo*, Sanggiang Serri is the daughter of the marriage between Bhatara Guru and Wê Saungriu. However, the daughter died at a young age. There has been a prediction that when Sanggiang Serri is an adult, she will grow up to be a very beautiful goddess, but her beauty will cause wars between the kings of the archipelago to have her.

So that the war did not occur, Sanggiang Serri died at the age of 7 days and from the fighting of Sanggiang Serri grew the first rice plants in the Luwu area. For the Bugis people, rice is always placed in a high place (Langkayan), and the Bugis consider it a mother.

Respect for Sanggiang Serri has a similar meaning to Dewi Sri found in Hinduism. In the Hindu community in Bali, Dewi Sri is also known as Sang Hyang Sri, a goddess who gives prosperity. In Balinese Hindu society, worship of Dewi Sri is very common, for example, worship of Bhatara Sri or Sang Sri which is a form of worship to the goddess of rice and worship of Ida Bhatara Sri Sedana or commonly referred to as the goddess of sustenance.

In addition to conducting the Mapalili Traditional ceremony, the bissu also has an annual ceremony, the Matemu Arajang ceremony. This ceremony is a form of respect for the heirlooms owned by bissu. The heirlooms can be in the form of a rice field plow, old stones, or old photos. The communication process is carried out through certain rituals using the divine language or what is called the Torilangi Language which can only be understood by fellow bissu (Makkulau, 2007: 71). Muhammad Salim (Trans literature and Translator of Book *I La Galigo*) in Makkulau (2008: 48) states that the language in the Book *I La Galigo* is an old Bugis language mixed with Sanskrit. Seeing the opinion of Muhammad Salim, it can be estimated that the language used by the bissu is Sanskrit mixed with ancient Bugis. Bissu as an ancient Bugis priest who in pre-Islamic times had an important position in the implementation of traditional ceremonies experienced various shocks in his efforts to maintain ancient Bugis culture. Surpi (2016: 51) states that during times of pressure and flight, bissu were often evicted and even crushed when they appeared in the village. Over time, bissu again emerged as the leader of ancient Bugis rituals carried out by the South Sulawesi Cultural Service.

Bissu Condition in the Present Era

In Bugi's belief, a bissu is neither male nor female. They are a symbol of the perfection that can have both male and female souls. They are leaders in all traditional rituals performed in Bugis Land. However, along with the times, the role of a bissu faded away and the rituals they performed were considered idolatrous acts. However, the bissu are warrior figures who up to now still maintain ancient Bugis customs and traditions.

In the days of the kingdom, a bissu lived peacefully in a kingdom, devoting himself to the king and society. The existence of Bissu began to be pressed at the beginning of the XVII century, named after

the entry of Islam to South Sulawesi. Since then the role of Bissu has become marginalized and has been replaced by a new institution called Parewa ada and Parewa sara (Pelras, 2006: 72). In subsequent developments, the role of Bissu as a priest was almost lost because ritual ceremonies were no longer justified. Bissu rituals are considered as musical activities and are against the spirit of implementing sharia as driven by the Kingdom of Gowa. The role of Bissu diminished when the royal government shifted to a republican government, along with the decline in the role of traditional institutions.

It did not stop there, the existence of Bissu became increasingly marginalized when the Darul Islam (DI) group led by Kahar Muzakkar crushed all teachings that were not by Islamic law in South Sulawesi. The bissu were forced to become hard-working men. After the G30S / PKI incident the pressure on Bissu became even stronger, a youth organization called Operation Toba (penance operation) hunted down Bissu on the grounds of being part of the communist movement.

They are also considered to have no religion, commit musical acts, and adhere to animist teachings. Ironically, the doctrine is applied so that the general public also rejects the existence of bissu and ancient Bugis beliefs that are considered incompatible with Islamic teachings (Surpi, 2016: 51). Many of the Bissu ceremonial equipment was burned and drowned in the sea. Besides, many Bissu and Sarno (shaman) were killed or mutilated to become normal men who could work hard. The community is also tempted that when they see bissu must be expelled because it can eliminate the charity that has been collected for 40 days. Makkulau (2008: 23) states that the old bissu that still exist today are the bissu who managed to save themselves, most of them were bissu, who had a social function and were recorded in the Bugis community in South Sulawesi.

During the period of the Siang Kingdom, it was also a threat to the bissu,

namely during the heyday of this kingdom, many archipelago traders stopped at Siang's harbor, until the Portuguese also finally arrived at Siang following a Malay merchant voyage. At the same time as the lunch port was busy, boxes and interactions made it possible for the Portuguese pastor to come to spread Christianity in the afternoon. However, the effort to spread Christianity did not go smoothly, this was because there was very strong opposition and opposition from the bissu, who were also positioned as royal priests (Makkulau, 2008: 25).

Besides that, another reason Christianity cannot develop like Islam is that the Bugis people are more interested in the beliefs they have embraced (Triadi, 78). Nevertheless, some Bugis people still believe in the role of a bissu which is very important in maintaining the culture they have carried out (ancient Bugis culture). However, for now, the existence of bissu is fragmented they will regroup at a ceremony. This is because today's bissu must find work so that they can continue their life because nothing else guarantees their survival.

There is no attention from the government for their survival because there is no longer Galung Arajang which is the source of life throughout the year. Now the bissu are forced to adopt a professional position to continue their life. They depend their life on the call of the people who carry out the wedding ceremony to become a peris bride or what is called Indo'botting. In bridal make-up, a bissu is believed to be able to make the bride and groom look elegant and charming.

Besides, currently, Bissu is also very active in regional tourism activities, especially Bissu in Pangkep Regency. One of the Bissu activities that can attract tourists to the attraction of Magiri. Magiri is one of the attractions performed by a bissu by stabbing kris into several parts of their body such as the neck, eyes, stomach, hands, and other body parts. In ancient times, Magiri attractions were only carried

out during traditional ceremonies such as the Mapalili ceremony and other traditional ceremonies.

However, currently along with the development of tourism, Magiri activities can be shown in general, such as in the performance of Terater I La Galigo and during state activities.

The Hindu Dharma concept in South Sulawesi has similarities with the Hindu style in the archipelago and Hindus. Where the teachings of Hindu Dharma are present without eliminating local culture. Hindu Dharma teachings provide enlightenment and roll in the local culture. So it can be said that in the past the Land of Bugis was a Hindu land just like Hinduism in Kutai, Tarumanegara, and other places had a royal style.

IV. CONCLUSION

Bissu is priests or religious leaders in the traditional beliefs of the ancient Bugis people. The word Bissu comes from the word "Bessi" (Bugis) which means "clean". A bissu is considered clean because it does not bleed (menstruate), is pure (not dirty) does not have breasts. A bissu, in general, is a man but looks like a woman or woman from among the high noble daughters. They are men whose physical condition is abnormal. They like to wear feminine clothes in everyday life. The job of a bissu is to carry out rituals in a kingdom and the life of the Bugis people such as birth, whether the first step is to set foot on the ground, circumcision, cutting teeth, and the Mapalili ceremony. However, along with the development of the era, the position of Bissu began to be marginalized, namely that there was no more special attention given by the government to their survival. So that many Bissu change their profession to become a bridal makeup artist and work on the fields and rice fields as well as take part in regional tourism activities. The existence of Bissu in South Sulawesi Province is one of the diversity that is owned by the Indonesian State so that the

traditions carried out by Bissu should be preserved and their survival is considered.

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