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Introduction

The Orang Talang – one of the indigenous tribal groups in Riau – formerly lived in a clearly defined region that they call *hutan tanah wilayah*,² the ancestral territories over which they exercised absolute control and ownership. They did not move beyond its boundaries, living there from generation to generation in harmony with their natural surroundings. For a society like the Petalangan, natural surroundings are far more than just a place in which to live and seek a livelihood; at a far deeper level it is the yardstick by which they measure everything, including their very own identity. The harmony of their life with nature is anchored in the *monto* (mantra) *belian*³ that states: ‘Hidup orang Talang di hutan tanah, hutan tanah hilang orang Talang pun punah’ (The Talang people live in the forest; when the forest vanishes, the Talang people perish with it).⁴ Further on in the recitation of the taboos concerning the forest come the words: ‘Yang dikatakan pantangan besar, merusakkan hutan membinasakan belukar’ (That which is said to be the heaviest taboo is to destroy the forest [and] extirpate the secondary growth).⁵ The elders among the Petalangan remember: ‘Rusak hutan binasa badan, rusak belukar hidup terkapar’ (To destroy the forest is to exterminate the body, to destroy the secondary growth is to live in disorder). This is followed up by the advice: ‘Supaya hidup mendapat berkat, terhadap hutan tanah berhemat cermat; supaya hidup mendapat tuah, jaga pelihara hutan dan tanah’ (So that life may be filled with blessings, behave with the greatest circumspection regarding the forest; so that life may be filled with fortune, be vigilant in

¹ This paper was translated from Indonesian into English by Rosemary Robson, Cynthia Chou and Will Derks.

² They also referred to it as *hutan tanah pebatinan* or the *batin* territories; *tanah adat pesukuan* or the customary land of the tribe; *tanah ulayat Petalangan* or the land of the Petalangan; *hutan tanah soko pesukuan* or the tribe’s territories.

³ The *belian* ceremony is the great healing ceremony of Petalangan society. Similar ceremonies are found among other *suku asli* (indigenous groups) societies in Riau. The Orang Talang Mamak call it *bulian*, the Orang Sakai and Orang Utan refer to it as *dikei*.

⁴ This verbal expression of custom is usually part and parcel of the installation ceremony of the head of the tribe or the spiritual leader of the customary law, called *bilang undang* (recitation of the law), and the reciter is called *tuk pebilang*.

⁵ The taboos relating to the forest are usually expressed during the ceremony *mem-buka hutan tanah* (opening the forest land), or in the *menjojak bonei* (planting the seed) ceremony, which marks the beginning of the planting of the *ladang* (the dry fields).

caring for the forest and the land).⁶ References like these are reinforced by the passing on of customary law, which lays down and empowers severe punitive sanctions for anybody who destroys the forest.

The extent of the measures taken by this society to care for and guard the balance of the forest is reflected in the customary decree that divides the forest land into various sections, namely: *tanah kampung* (for the settlements and the houses of the inhabitants); *tanah dusun* (for gardens and any eventual extension of the kampung); *tanah peladangan* (the land for planting rice in dry fields, which is shifted from site to site around the area in a cycle which varies from five to ten years); *rimba larangan* (natural refuge, a place where various species of plants and animals can live free from harm, of which the destruction is forbidden and of which the protection is sacrosanct).

In former times, the Orang Talang were able to honor the principle of living in harmony with nature in perpetuity, because they owned and controlled the far-flung forest area and they were free to use it according to the strictures of their custom and culture. Thriving on the yield of their dry fields, the gardens, small creeks and rivers, as well as benefiting from the varied bounty provided by the forest, they were able to supply everything they needed to live on, although this was under the simplest of conditions and very close to nature. The strength of *adat* (customary law) in their social life created a climate of peace, harmony and unity, encapsulated within which they carried out their day-to-day life. Thus a group of the older Orang Petalangan are still 'homesick' for the life in the past, a feeling that they vent in the sayings: 'Walaupun hidup di pondok ladang, makan sedap hati pun tenang' (Although life was in a hut in the fields, the food was delicious and [our] hearts were at peace); and 'Walaupun hidup berhujan berpanas, makan sedap alam pun luas' (Although [we] lived in the rain and the heat, the food was tasty and the forest was wide).⁷

Nowadays, this pattern of life, which epitomizes unity with nature, can no longer be maintained. Change follows relentlessly upon the heels of change, which insidiously influences the pattern of life and the local cultural values. Nostalgia for the life in days gone by now lives on only in the imaginations of the older people, who are generally loath to accept change. The majority of the younger generation, of their own choice, have begun to distance themselves from it, abandoning the pattern of life of their

⁶ The advice of the elders is often passed on during explications of the *undang berladang* (the law of the fields), or during the ceremony *memole sialang* (attending upon the *sialang*, those trees in which the bees prefer to build their nests), or at the beginning of *beramu*, the collecting of wood in the jungle.

⁷ Sayings that are imbued with nostalgia for the past are usually expressed by older people who still adhere strictly to *adat istiadat* (the customs and the law), as well as keeping to the principle of living in harmony with nature. Their yearning for the past is based solely on the principle of custom, and has no connection whatsoever with government regulations or modern-day politics.

ancestors based on harmony with nature. Their lives are complicated by the fact that they are continuously being confronted with the accelerating current of change and the problems it brings in its wake.

This paper is an attempt to convey some information about the changes that have occurred in the life of the Petalangan people of Riau, especially those affecting the pattern of their lives and the attitudes they have to this.

Background to Change

When the area was ruled by the kingdom of Pelalawan, the greater part of the realm was in the hands of the Petalangan because they controlled twenty-nine districts of the *hutan tanah wilayah* or *kawasan pebatinan*, which was called *pebatinan kuang oso tigo pulou* (the thirty *pebatinan* less one). Each district or *pebatinan* was headed by a *batin*, who also became the *payung panji* or *pucuk adat*, the fountainhead of the *adat* of his tribe. He was assisted by several *pemangku adat* (adat heads) who were called *ketiapan*. The *pebatinan* and the *ketiapan* were installed by the people of their tribe, and afterward confirmed in their office by the Sultan of Pelalawan.

The territory of the *pebatinan* was spread over four areas known as *kedatuan*, namely: Kedatuan Datuk Laksemana Mangku Diraja, Kedatuan Datuk Kampar Samar Diraja, Kedatuan Datuk Bandar Setia Diraja, and Kedatuan Datuk Engku Raja Lela Putera. In each *kedatuan* a *batin yang dituakan* (a senior *batin*) was appointed by all the *batin* of the *kedatuan*, in consultation with their *datuk*, and this appointment was then confirmed by the Sultan who accorded him the titles *monti ajo* (king's minister) and *temu payung*.

The *batin* and *ketiapan* had full powers to administer the *adat istiadat* of each of the groups, except for that part of the *adat* falling under the authority of the crown, which was administered by the *datuk* in each *kedatuan*. The Sultan backed them up in all matters to do with ownership, use and care of the *hutan tanah wilayah* both by word of mouth and in writing (documents usually known as Surat Keterangan Hutan Tanah, Declaration of the Forest Lands). Thus, given the freedom to organize their law and custom as well as having rights to ownership, management, use and care of the land, the Petalangan people were able to lead their way of life unhindered, adhering to the model and the values laid down by the *adat*. Yet, at the same time, they enjoyed the recognition and affirmation of the Sultan, which meant that strangers coming in from outside could not act as they pleased within the boundaries of the *pebatinan*. The protection that the kingdom afforded the society strengthened their ties of loyalty to the Sultan as they felt assured that they were safeguarded, treated justly since their rights were respected and they were placed on the same footing as the other peoples in the area. Evidence of this loyalty of the Petalangan to the kingdom of Pelalawan was evinced in their willingness to form the

nucleus of the royal troops whenever danger threatened the sultanate.

On 30 August 1945, in an official ceremony, the last Sultan of Pelalawan (Tengku Said Harun) formally declared himself and his kingdom and all the people therein to have been absorbed into the Republic of Indonesia. This moment marked the official end of the kingdom of Pelalawan, and the beginnings of a number of fundamental changes, not only in the methods of government, but also in the lives of the people. Shortly afterward, the territory of the former kingdom of Pelalawan became the *kewedanaan* Pelalawan, the area encompassing a *kedatuan* was transformed into a *kecamatan* (subdistrict), namely Kecamatan Pengkalan Kuras, Kecamatan Bunut, Kecamatan Kuala Kampar and Kecamatan Langgam. The *pebatinan* were made into *desa* (the largest part of each *pebatinan* was split up into a smaller area to make several *desa*). The transformation of the *pebatinan* into *desa* (not forgetting those which had to be split up into several *desa*), each of which was placed under the charge of a *desa* head, sounded the death knell of the formal status of the *batin*. Even though in this initial stage many *batin* were appointed village heads, they no longer enjoyed the status of a *batin*; they were now simply village heads with duties, rights, obligations and responsibilities which were determined by the government.

In the period that followed, those *batin* who had become village heads were gradually replaced, because they often did not fulfill the formal qualifications required of a village head (some of them were illiterate or had only attended a *sekolah rakyat*, of which the present equivalent is a *sekolah dasar* or primary school, which they failed to complete, or because they were too old). Since very few local candidates could meet the requirements (even though these were set at an absolute minimum), an 'outsider' would be appointed as successor to the former village heads. This willingness to accept an outsider as village head demonstrates the absolute loyalty of the Petalangan people to the government. This period marks the beginning of an era in which, little by little, newcomers began to find their way into the villages. Recently this influx has become a steady stream, so that newcomers now outnumber the original inhabitants.

There have been many profound changes in the forests, because the rights of ownership, management and use are now completely controlled by the government in accordance with legislation and current regulations. The society is no longer at liberty to own, make decisions about and use the forest, but is obliged to comply with governmental rules and regulations. This change has clearly impinged very little on the consciousness of the Petalangan people. Even though some have understood what has happened, they still regard their former right to own the forest to be in force. Cogently, some of them still retain the Surat Keterangan Hutan Tanah, which was once issued by the Sultan of Pelalawan, and which they are convinced is still valid. When the changes first took place, these matters did not give rise to many problems, because it was an area that was little

affected by development. It was only after a part of their area came under the control of the owners of HPH (Hak Penghutanan, a license to harvest or use the forest), that problems began to loom when the trees that provided a livelihood began to be felled, including the *sialang* trees in which bees build their nests. The government was speedily apprised of the problem, and to protect those trees that were the source of the livelihood of the people, the governor of Riau issued a decree that forbade the cutting of these specific trees. When this decree was issued, the pace of the progress of development in Riau was not nearly as fast as it is now. The threat to the survival of the forest was then posed only by the felling of trees for logging, which at that time was indeed rapidly gaining ground. It was in view of this industry that the decree forbade only the cutting down of *sialang* and other trees in which bees built their nests, but not including a prohibition on the *rimba kepungan sialang* (the forest around the *sialang*), even though this was the area which was the key to the survival of the species. It is also obvious that *sialang* or any other sort of tree is not likely to offer a safe home in which bees can build their nests if all around them there are no other trees or flowering plants to provide them with their source of honey.

The development of Riau has been forging ahead since then, and toward the end of the 1980s for the first time land in the province was opened up for large-scale plantations, first and foremost for private firms wanting to grow palms for palm oil (*sawit*). Since then Petalangan areas have been subject to large-scale clearance for this sort of enterprise. In order to save the remnants of the *rimba kepungan sialang* and to protect the people's gardens as well as the land still cultivated by the local inhabitants, the provincial government of Riau issued another decree from the governor of Riau containing a prohibition on felling in those particular areas that comprise the land used by the people for the source of their livelihood.

Were all sides to observe the contents of the governor of Riau's decree that protects *rimba kepungan sialang*, *rimba larangan*, the village gardens and the land cultivated by the local inhabitants, cases involving either forest or land assuredly would not arise (especially in the villages), and the people would not suffer any undue damage or fall victim to shady characters and undesirable types who lack any sense of responsibility. On the other hand, development that is genuinely directed at raising skills, standards of living, and the prosperity of the people would not have the reverse effect, namely the placing of extra burdens on the ordinary people. In point of fact, the intention of the government in opening up the area is and was to ensure equitable development and to rescue the people from poverty. The national government's publication concerning the identification of the location of poverty-stricken areas in the province of Riau declares that the *kecamatan* (subdistricts) Pengkalan Kuras, Langgam, Kuala Kampar and Bunut should be categorized as 'poor areas'; in fact, the subdistricts Pengkalan Kuras and Kuala Kampar are even designated

'very poor indeed' (Direktorat Jenderal Agraria Departemen Dalam Negeri 1978). Evidence to support this is provided by the fact that the income per head of these particular subdistricts is most alarmingly low, namely: in subdistrict Pengkalan Kuras it is Rp. 29,683 per year; in subdistrict Langgam Rp. 38,039 per year; in subdistrict Bunut Rp. 41,497 per year; and that in subdistrict Kuala Kampar is almost as bad as the others.

Since development of the area has commenced, the income of the people has risen steadily. This can be abstracted from a survey by the provincial government for the year 1981, which shows a growth in the income per head of population in the subdistrict Pengkalan Kuras to Rp. 55,208 per annum (Direktorat Pembangunan Desa Propinsi Riau 1981). Since then, the development in this area has proceeded, and the per capita income of the inhabitants has risen accordingly. This can be confirmed by a look at the results of the investigation carried out by the Yayasan Setanggi (the Setanggi Foundation) for the year 1991, which shows that the income per head of population in the villages that were investigated in the subdistrict Pengkalan Kuras averaged Rp. 384,287.67 per year (Yayasan Setanggi dengan BAPPEDA Tk. 1 Propinsi Riau 1991). It is highly probable that this growth will continue, but it is also possible that it will decline since land-ownership continues to shrink. This is the inevitable consequence of the rise in the price of land, which induces some of the members of the society to sell their land to outsiders, or prompts irresponsible actions on the part of certain parties who endeavor to control or sell that land for their own private profit. This is why the governor of Riau reminded the government and the people that

'although the land is becoming increasingly valuable, this asset may not be regarded only from the point of view of business industries. The future of the life of those sections of society that are not in a position to own the land that is available in the villages must not be overlooked. This land has provided a livelihood for them from generation to generation. Their very life depends on the existence of the land that they have tilled throughout the centuries. Taking these two points into consideration, this resource should not easily be diverted to the wants and desires of others to control it, even though they should endeavor to do so through procedures which are valid, laid down by regulations and in laws.'⁸

Changes in Petalangan Society

Against this background, that began to take shape with the passing of the Pelalawan sultanate, there have since been fundamental changes in the swift tide of development right down to the village level, bringing in their wake dissonances and problems. These have confronted Petalangan people with complicated choices in their efforts to maintain themselves on

⁸ Quoted from a speech given by the governor of Riau, Soeripto, in a meeting to discuss the problem of land at the government house in Pekanbaru on 11 September 1995. See *Riau Pos*, 12-09-1995.

an even keel. Given the present condition of their environment, the people can no longer live in harmony with nature. In order to survive, they have been forced to make changes in their way of living, so that they no longer live at one with nature, but have begun to be 'divorced' from their natural surroundings. Once their life was firmly governed by the *adat*, now it has begun to drift apart from these principles, regrettably leading to the abandonment of their traditional ancestral values. Leaving behind their traditional life, they have embarked upon an era of progress of science and technology. Once their lives were bound by their villages, nowadays they are migrating. Although this change has not yet permeated all levels of Petalangan society, the majority of the people have been affected, above all the younger generation and those who mix frequently with newcomers from outside.

Under these conditions, some members of society no longer cultivate the dry fields, even though in their areas there are still patches of land that can be used for this purpose. This is all the more sad as they have sayings such as: 'Tanda sayang ke anak bini, rajin ke tanah berladang padi' (The expression of love for one's children and wife is to toil assiduously in the soil of the fields). One section of Petalangan society has completely abandoned agricultural pursuits, preferring to work as factory hands or to become (small) traders, while a small minority have become civil servants. Another group has chosen to work in *kelapa sawit* or oil palm plantations and have elected to move to new settlements that have been provided by the companies managing these plantations, mixing with other people. Once these people were virtually bound to their villages, where they were born and where they died. This attitude is reflected in customary sayings enshrining the Petalangan *adat* that run: 'Walaupun elok kampung orang, kampung sendiri pantang dibuang' (Even though the village of others is fine, one's own village is not to be abandoned). Or: 'Kalau pusaka hendak berkepanjangan, jangan tinggalkan kampung halaman' (If you want to ensure that your heirlooms remain forever, do not leave your native village).⁹ The closeness of their ties to their natal villages has ensured that these people live their lives there from one generation to the next. The fact that some members of society now want to move away and settle elsewhere gives an indication of a drastic change in the pattern of their lives, because this turning of one's back on the village of one's birth inevitably brings changes in the model of the *adat istiadat*.

Those members of society who have abandoned their peasant existence

⁹ These *adat* sayings form part of the corpus of expressions that are known as *adat kampung* (village customs), of which the essence is to perpetuate the pattern of life that frowns upon leaving the village of one's birth, because there people live from generation to generation guarding their heirlooms and the customary law. To go away and leave the village is considered to be a gesture of irresponsibility to the tribe, the *adat* and the forest.

and sought some new form of livelihood are considered 'to have forgotten their origins' or 'to have deserted their mother', because according to *adat*, the earth is their 'mother' and the sky is their 'father'. This is demonstrated in sayings such as 'Kita berasal dari tanah, hidup mati tetap di tanah' (From the earth we spring, for the length of our days we are bound to the earth).¹⁰ The variation in choice now open to the people enables them to defend their old way of life or to take another direction, which from one point of view raises their standard of living and their prosperity, but at the same time means that they are in danger of losing the cultural values of their ancestors as well as their identity.

Changes in the pattern of life exercise an enormous influence on the cultural values and social norms that are adhered to by the society. The consequence of the 'divorce' from nature is that values that have their source in and are bound up with nature undergo changes and mutations, perhaps even disappear altogether. With this phenomenon, new values also emerge. Turning specifically to the Petalangan society, the majority of its cultural values are inextricably linked to the *adat istiadat* that they have inherited down through the generations. This is the reason that *adat* is unshakably held in high esteem by the society that acknowledges it. This situation is reflected in the saying: 'Biar anak mati, jangan mati adat' (Even should a child perish, do not allow the *adat* to die).¹¹ Those people who merely pay lip service to *adat* or ignore it, are described as 'orang tak beradat' (people without *adat*) or 'tak tahu adat' (who are ignorant of *adat*), and such people are greatly despised in the eyes of the society. Nowadays the situation is a world away from this. Even though, broadly speaking, *adat* is still honored, it is often neglected. The ties of *adat*, which were once so strong have begun to slacken. Much of it has been reduced to mere sayings, while its values are no longer kept alive.

Formerly, because the Petalangan people lived in harmony with nature, many of the exhortations of *adat* that were bound up with nature contained essential values pertaining to the relationship between mankind and nature. These values materialized in various *adat* ceremonies or in the customary regulations. Among these sorts of ceremonies were: *menumbai*,

¹⁰ These sorts of sayings spring readily to the lips of the *kemantan*, *juagan* (the bee experts), *dukun* (shamans) and the *pemangku adat* (*adat* leaders) when they impart instructions to their people by means of *monto* (mantra). One such mantra runs as follows: 'Berpijak pada Yang Satu, berbapak kepada langit, beribu kepada bumi, bersaudara kepada alam' (He who believes in The One, [his] father is the sky, [his] mother is the earth, [his] family is the natural world).

¹¹ Sayings like this are common currency among all the *suku asli* societies, as well as the Malays of Riau. Some of them say: 'Biar mati bini asal adat tidak mati' (Your wife may die as long as the *adat* survives); or: 'Biar berbaju buruk asalkan beradat elok' (Though the jacket be in tatters, this is of no consequence as long as the *adat* is beautiful).

the collecting of the honey from the *sialang* trees; *menotau tana* or *memoti tana*, killing the ground by expelling supernatural creatures that inhabit it, because this soil was now destined to be used for human purposes; *memole imbo*, blessing the forest to protect it from all evils; *memolo sialang*, caring for or looking after the *sialang* trees; *menjojak bonei*, broadcasting the paddy seeds on the dry fields; the *beamu* or *beban-an*, the gathering of wood in the forest; the *mandi aei jojok tana*, scattering water on the fields; and others like them. Quite apart from giving such ceremonial reminders, *adat* also regulated the conservation and use of the forest, which were called: *adat beutan tana*, *adat* of the forest land; *adat beimbo dalam*, *adat* of the inner forest; *adat beladang*, customs pertaining to the dry fields; *adat kopung sialang*, the customs pertaining to the *sialang*; *adat sungai*, the river customs which all had to do with the catching of fish; *adat uang bebu-u*, the hunting lore which governed the hunting of the forest animals; and more of the same sort.

Nowadays this *adat* is but rarely applied, because those stretches of forest that are still governed by customary structures are few and far between. Those that still remain are now under the aegis of different people, or are no longer run according to the *adat* prescriptions. There are even some groups of people in the society who sell the remnants of such land to other parties, or else they destroy them for their own private gain. This sort of event is extremely disruptive and is forbidden by *adat*. The act of destroying forest land or, worse still, selling it, is a deed drenched in shame. Perpetrators face heavy customary sanctions, they may even be expelled from their society.

Apart from the *adat* principles just discussed, there are many other tenets that are being subjected to changes and mutations in values. This process can be observed in a number of circumstances. One good example is in the marriage ceremony. One section of the population no longer adheres to the marriage *adat*, which was once strictly respected. Various elements in the marriage ceremony are now ignored or have been altered to fit with this modern era. This is despite the fact that the marriage *adat* contains many values that are well worth preserving. Among those that spring to mind are mutual assistance, unity and oneness, mutual respect, social solidarity, religiosity, and yet more that reflect the identity of the community. Formerly, the marriage ceremony was not a casual affair dictated by the demands of individual desires. It was conducted in accordance with the prescriptions of custom, beginning with the choice of the prospective spouses and carrying right through to the very last of the series of ceremonies. From that initial moment the ceremonies indicated social status, kinship, the fidelity of friendship, mutual assistance and other such principles solidly rooted in custom. Customary adages apposite to this among the Petalangan are: 'Elok helat karena mufakat, elok kerja karena bersama' (Fine is it to have guests because they bring concord, the work is fine because we do it together); or: 'Apabila hendak berhelat jamu, kepada

adat tegak bertumpu' (Whenever guests are feasted, the rules of the *adat* are held high).¹²

In former times, when an incident involving a member of the society had to be resolved, it was sufficient to resort to *adat*. Whatever the proportions assumed by the problem, it was solved by discussion and mutual agreement, led by the *pemangku adat pesukuan*. Nowadays, even though the same procedure is still observed, the final pronouncement is no longer given according to or in line with *adat*, it is now made in a formal way by the village head and the various officials who assist him. It is now by no means uncommon for *adat* decisions to be changed by other parties, with the consequence that their authority is undermined to such an extent that their force is ignored. This despite the fact that custom perpetuates the values of consultation and consensus, a fact echoed in traditional sayings: 'Kata adat kata putus, kata putus karena mufakat' (What the *adat* says is the final word, it is the final word because it is the consensus). Losing sight of the principle of consultation (*musyawarah*) in reaching a consensus (*mufakat*) marks the beginning of their neglect. Many values have been lost sight of, because these two interdependent principles enshrine such ancestral values as: social justice, unity and oneness, humanity, to mention but a few of them. Even more importantly, consultation and consensus were the outward and visible sign of the harmony of life and the order that prevailed in the society. The loss of such values encourages excesses of egoism, arrogance and arbitrariness. It leads to the shrugging off of other people's opinions and to marks of indifference, bringing the harmony in society to the brink of collapse.

These changes and permutations in social values can also be observed in changes in social behavior, which is betraying a growing tendency to prize material possessions above moral standards. Previously, what was most respected in a person was courtesy and strength of character, but this appreciation now seems to have shifted to wealth and rank. The pernicious effects are even now undermining kinship and have given rise to derisory remarks like: 'Bersaudara kepada harta' ([He is] related to his possessions); or one hears such statements as 'Siapa berharta banyak saudara' (Whoever owns extensive property has a good many relatives).

In former times, social intercourse among young people was strictly limited, and was scrupulously regulated by custom. These days, Petalangan youth associate freely, and moral lapses are now occurring in almost every one of their villages (albeit they are still a very rare occurrence). Nevertheless, the very fact that these do happen is an indication of a very funda-

¹² Precepts about marriage ceremonies are included among those *adat* sayings that are prized above all others. Indeed, among certain sections of Petalangan society they are included among the laws (*undang*), that is, *adat* prescriptions which are woven into the form of sayings. When these sayings are uttered this is known as *bilang undang*, speaking the laws.

mental change, because once upon a time such actions not only brought disgrace and shame upon their perpetrators, but all their relations were tainted with what was called 'great shame' (*aib besar*) or 'great disgrace' (*malu besar*), which led to them all to smear their foreheads with charcoal.

Formerly, *adat* legal sanctions could take the form of fines consisting of livestock (chickens, goats), hulled and unhulled rice and the like. The animals and the rice were cooked and eaten communally by both sides, so that the dispute that had flared up was settled fair and square. It would not be pursued and no revenge would be sought at any time in the future. Nowadays the place of livestock, produce and cloths has been taken by money, and after this has been accepted by the 'victor', there is no longer any ceremony or communal meal. This way of dealing with disputes means that the matter is not rounded off, because the verdict is not sealed by a communal meal that would once have been attended by all the people of the village as witnesses to the fact that the dispute had been 'wound up'.

When this was still the custom the life of this society was extremely simple and the vital necessities of its members were limited. They had not yet made the acquaintance of radios, tape recorders, televisions and similar sorts of goods that have now begun to make their appearance in the homes of Petalangan people, purchased either from itinerant traders or directly at the market. Since the onset of this phenomenon, these possessions have come to be accepted as the 'pride' of their owners, besides becoming a symbol of social status. Everybody, without exception, does his or her best to acquire them, either paying cash or entering into a credit agreement. This has meant that such values as economy, thriftiness, and frugality are beginning to be cast aside. The society is starting to be characterized by consumption; people buying goods for the sake of 'pride' without heeding either their own economic capacity or cultural values. This occurs while their *adat* reminds them that '*pandai berhemat hidup selamat*' (the thrifty live in security). Besides causing a great deal of financial damage in society in general (they always buy at double the price because they have to buy on credit or they are defrauded by the traders, and later on when the goods are worn out, they are sold off cheaply), they are often also the reason that people fall into debt. To free themselves from this vicious circle and under duress from money lenders, they sometimes hit upon the idea of selling off their remaining pieces of forest or of embarking on ventures that up to now have remained taboo in their society. They are caught fast in a network of change in which one value after another triggers off a process of disruptions and changes in cultural values, which is growing swifter by the minute.

Changes in the Livelihood of the Society

To ensure their survival and to guarantee their future, the Petalangan have been forced to change their areas of employment and the way they earn

their livelihood. This adjustment has been forced because the natural resources that once provided the source of their basic needs now no longer suffice. Some of them have changed from an agrarian pattern of shifting cultivation of dry fields to working permanent dry fields. Others are rejuvenating their rubber gardens or are making orchards on the remaining patches of land that they own. Yet more become laborers on plantations, traders, or factory workers, while a small group enters government service. All the while there is still one group of people that does endeavor to maintain their traditional way of life in what remains of the forests of their tribe, or tap rubber on the old plantations that still belong to the local population. The widespread diversity of occupations and sources of livelihood nowadays does in certain cases raise the incomes of some, while for others it signifies an acceleration in the process of the loss of or the abandonment of local cultural values.

Changes in the Arts

Petalangan society possesses a genuine artistic treasure trove, which encompasses music, singing, dancing, oral storytelling, folk handicrafts and martial arts among its many forms. There was a time when the arts grew apace, because the life was relatively isolated and there was plenty of time for leisure, which meant that the people had the opportunity to indulge in the arts. This circumstance was bolstered by the fact that they often performed customary and traditional ceremonies, which were accompanied by artistic presentations. Moreover, it was through these artistic forms that moral precepts and ancestral cultural values, not to mention the social norms, were passed down from one generation to the next.

Petalangan oral tradition (folk tales, *pantun*, incantations, sayings) was heavily imbued with the cultural values of the society. These forms all enshrined *tunjuk ajar* (instructional precepts) and values which were essential to the people in their lives. This is especially true of the genre known as *nyanyi panjang* (literally 'long songs')¹³. Nowadays some sections of the society have begun to neglect their traditional arts. Apart from innovations in their social environment and areas of employment, this

¹³ *Nyanyi panjang* form a genre of Petalangan oral tradition that is chanted in a particular rhythm. Their contents are exceedingly diverse and heavily laden with instructional axioms. Among the *nyanyi panjang* are those that are pregnant with *adat* values and moral teachings, those that recount history (this sort are known as *tombo*), and those containing other sorts of stories. Because this oral tradition is presented in a particular rhythm and the stories it contains are fairly long, the presentation of one story can take anything between one and seven nights, hence the name *nyanyi panjang*. Among those stories that expressly concern *adat* teachings are *Bujang Si Undang* and *Bujang Tan Gemo*. Examples of those that are historical in nature are *Bujang Tan Domang*, *Sutan Peminggei*, and other stories of which the numbers run into the hundreds. In Sakai society this genre of oral tradition is called *kayat*, among the Bonai *koba*, and among the Talang Mamak *khavar*.

change of attitude stems from the effect of foreign cultural elements introduced via tape recorders and television. Moreover, there is a mounting influence from the newcomers who bring their own cultures with them. The time that was once used for artistic pursuits is now often taken up with the search for a livelihood and other activities, and the upshot is that this heritage is becoming attenuated. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the number of old people and their heritage is steadily shrinking, and the younger generation show much more of a tendency to admire foreign art forms supplied to them via the electronic appliances that they own and which are their pride and joy.

For those who remain loyal to traditions, the reduction in the number of customary and traditional ceremonial activities means that their opportunities for artistic presentations are dwindling. Should such a ceremony be held, most people now do not set aside the time for the holding of traditional artistic performances, because external forms of entertainment have been substituted for them or because they are deliberately overlooked giving due consideration to lack of finances or simply because of the absence of the paraphernalia required to stage such a show. This is all the more regretful, as once these performances were put on without any payment changing hands. It was part and parcel of the moral responsibility of the members of society to stage them at every ceremony for which they were intended. In fact, the very thought of such an artistic expression being related to money was considered an insult to *adat*, or was ridiculed by the society. In those days, the life of an artist was always esteemed by the people, who even went so far as to consider them 'pillars of society'. A person who was skilled in storytelling was known as *tukang ceito* (storyteller) or *tukang nyanyi panjang* (singer of long songs). They occupied an honored position, enjoyed considerable fame and traveled from village to village to tell their tales. They were supported by the entire society. The same was true of the practitioners of other arts, a situation that meant the arts and their observance were passed down from one generation to the other. In days gone by, the instruments and paraphernalia needed for artistic performances were all made by the performers themselves from materials found in their surroundings. This meant that they could perform their arts without being dependent on anybody else. Now, consonant with the changes that have taken place in their world, most of the raw materials required for making their instruments and other items are difficult to find, and the *tukang* who used to make them are a vanishing breed.

The recitation of *pantun* is scarcely ever performed now because the traditional ceremonies at which the reciting of and the responding to *pantun* were an integral part are rarely performed. One such example is *mengemping*, the pounding of rice chips in the fields that was held at the beginning of the rice harvest. This was a wonderful opportunity for the young people to find sweethearts by the expedient of reciting and answering *pantun*.

Monto (incantations) are starting to be abandoned because the numbers of those who have inherited them are beginning to die out. Those who generally possess a veritable wealth of such incantations are the *kemantan*, *juagan*, *bomo*, and other sorts of specialist shamans. Now there is a dearth of candidates to fill these positions, which means that as time goes by their numbers grow fewer and fewer.

Local handicrafts, which were once so useful in supplying household utensils and implements that were needed in everyday life, have now begun to be cast aside because these sorts of articles are being replaced by factory-made goods people buy at the markets. (Plastic sleeping mats now substitute for those once woven from rattan and pandanus leaves; almost all the implements required for farming and the tackle needed for hunting or fishing can be bought at the market; and the same can be said for all other sorts of equipment). The tragedy is that these sorts of skilled handicrafts can bring in a profit when they are sold commercially, because their form and quality are of a very high standard. However, as there is no demand for them yet, the craftsmen who make them are not interested in pursuing their craft any longer.

The art of dancing, especially that which has a sacral character (found for instance in the healing ceremony known as *belian*) is now known to only a very few people, because to be able to become a *kemantan belian* is by no means easy. Other dances like the *dewo* and *deo* are still admired and held in honor by some of the younger Petalangan generation.

The art of self-defense is known as *pencak silat*, and it still has a number of followers, but their numbers have decreased drastically when they are compared to the practitioners in former times. One of the reasons for this is that some sections of the society no longer have the musicians to accompany it, and even the instruments have become rare. Notwithstanding, performances of this martial art are often put on in various *adat* ceremonies, including those welcoming government visitors.

What has been said in the foregoing sections gives a general sketch of the changes that have taken place among the Petalangan people of Riau. They are not yet ready to be confronted with continual waves of changes that overtake them too quickly. The upshot is that they drift hopelessly along on the tide of change. One section has succeeded in gaining great benefit, but the other sections have been sorely afflicted by loss, especially that of their ancestral values that up to now have perpetuated their identity. This situation is understood by some of the members of the society, and they are making every effort to combat its negative impact. But, because these changes are so fundamental, to heal their effects would require such huge, far-reaching efforts that they are unable to do this on their own. To achieve their goal of developing and perpetuating the ancestral values the Petalangan people need a helping hand, extended either by the government or by private bodies. This would ensure that the society will not just drift around in a life teetering on the threshold.

Efforts to Guide and Develop Petalangan Society

Various efforts have already been made to assist the guidance and development of the Petalangan people, and at the same time to preserve their culture. Such efforts have been made both by the government and by other interested groups. There is genuine hope that, by stepping up development so that it reaches into the villages, including the Petalangan regions, the level of skills can be raised and thus improve the standard of living and the prosperity of the society. On the one hand such efforts have already shown some results, especially in such matters as raising the *per capita* income of the inhabitants and improving the level of their skills. Unfortunately these have been accompanied by various impacts which have detracted from the results achieved. This refers especially to the loss of the local ancestral cultural values, but also includes the negative influences that have crept in from outside.

Among the efforts which have been made to guide and develop human resources in the Petalangan region have been the opening of primary schools in every village, agricultural instructional training and information, including animal husbandry and local handicrafts. Gradually, government efforts have succeeded in raising the level of skills in the society, but on the whole they have not yet achieved the formation of a skilled, trained labor force that is able to fill employment vacancies in the area. This halting start to achieving goals is caused by a number of factors. For instance, school-age children are required by their parents to help with the work, especially traditional sorts of work carried out in the dry fields, fishing in the river, gathering the products of the forest, and suchlike activities. The result is that the majority of Petalangan children do not even finish their primary education. Other reasons include the fact that the schools are frequently located too far away from the settlements of the Petalangan (which are still widely dispersed), and a shortage of teachers (in a number of schools in the region there are only one to three teachers per school, because teachers who have been appointed there are unable to feel at home and settle down; this applies especially to those who are young and city born).

The various training schemes that have been introduced so far have proved unsatisfactory because they are not taken far enough, or perhaps there has been a shortage of funds, or some other factor. Despite all these drawbacks, slowly the people are beginning to understand the importance of science and technology in raising their standard of living and their prosperity, in their search for employment, and in other sources of their livelihood. One other important contribution to improving their way of life has been the raising of the standards of health care via various units, which includes the propagation of family planning.

There have been various schemes to assist the attempts to preserve (as well as guide and develop) the culture. These include:

- The establishment of Kelembagaan Adat Petalangan (Institutes for Petalangan Adat), which the government has founded in cooperation with the Lembaga Adat Melayu Riau (The Institute for Riau Malay Adat). These institutes have a staff of *pemangku* and *pemuka adat pesukuan*.
- Appointing several of the *pemuka adat petalangan*, who represent the region at the subdistrict, to places in the Lembaga Adat Kabupaten (District Adat Institute).
- Petalangan arts have been encouraged by such steps as the sending a Petalangan Arts Team to represent its people within the province of Riau itself, as well as nationally and even as far as Malaysia (Festival Gendang Nusantara in Malacca, 1995).
- Setting up the Pusat Budaya Petalangan (Petalangan Cultural Center) in the *desa* of Betung, in the subdistrict Pengkalan Kuras, district of Kampar, with the financial support of the provincial government of Riau, which set aside funding in the Annual Budgets for 1994/1995 and 1995/1996, organized by the Yayasan Setanggi. This complex now consists of such facilities as a Cultural Hall and a Handicrafts Hall, and steps are now being taken to supply it with electricity, access roads, and other such necessities. In 1996 the Petalangan Museum was built, and there are plans for other such amenities.
- The launching of a scheme for the documentation of Petalangan culture that will be executed with the assistance of the Riau Provincial Government, the Toyota Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. The work will be in the hands of experts with the collaborative assistance of the Setanggi Foundation and the Center for Malay Studies of the Islamic University of Riau and other similar bodies.
- Instruction in folk handicrafts has been carried out by the Provincial Office and the Industrial Department of the Riau Province, as well as by the Dharma Wanita (Association of Wives of Civil Servants) in *desa* Betung.
- Several members of the younger generation of Petalangan people have had training in wood carving in Pekanbaru, and have since returned to their villages.
- Assistance has been given for the marketing of folk handicrafts (plaiting and other sorts of handwork), which include musical instruments (drums) and mats woven from pandanus leaves. This marketing has taken place in both Pekanbaru and in other districts, even as far away as Malaysia. These commercial efforts have so far proved disappointing, but will be continued so that the craftsmen can be rewarded with satisfactory remuneration for their work and the crafts themselves can continue to flourish.

It is hoped that the establishment of the Petalangan Cultural Center in *desa* Betung will encourage, build up, and preserve the aspects of Petalangan culture that have been concentrated there. Furthermore, it is hoped that this can be spread to the very heart of Petalangan society, not to mention other societies as well. Hopes are high among researchers and lovers of the culture that all sorts of cultural outpourings will be given

utterance in *desa* Betung. In order to support the Cultural Center, all sorts of efforts are being made to invite artists and other cultural practitioners to come to *desa* Betung by providing them with housing and a place to work. The goal of this scheme is to assemble all the leading artistic lights from among the Petalangan in Betung, so that they can pass on the knowledge that they have inherited to future generations as well as to other people at the present time. Furthermore, there are plans afoot to invite leading artists and prominent members of other tribal groups (*suku asli*) to Betung to see the efforts being made there, in the hope that they themselves will feel inspired to make similar efforts to preserve their cultures.

Quite apart from all the attempts to improve conditions in Petalangan society mentioned above, initiatives have also been undertaken in the economic sphere. One such has been the building of experimental fishponds for the breeding of fish. These have been built with financial contributions from the Riau provincial government, while the guidance and actual work were carried out under the auspices of the Fisheries Department of the province of Riau. Now, having observed the returns from these experimental ponds, the inhabitants of Betung are building similar ponds on their own initiative. The hope is that by encouraging this move, the people will no longer seek fish in the rivers (which have begun to be polluted). Now plans are being laid to build experimental ponds which are specially suited to the local species of fish.

Since there are still remnants of the Rimba Kepungan Sialang (the forest encircling the bee trees) in the Petalangan region, plans have been formed to harness this forest land for the growing of ornamental plants, for plants that are the source of traditional medicines, and other special forms of vegetation that are still to be found in the surrounding forests.

The region around the *desa* of Betung still produces a satisfactory agricultural yield (part of the region has been opened up to become oil palm plantations), and this remaining land will be developed as experimental gardens for settled agriculture, using both local seedlings as well as those brought in from outside the area which are considered to be suitable for this sort of land. It is hoped that the example of these experimental fields will encourage the people to continue their tradition of planting rice in the fields, but to abandon the old system of shifting cultivation.

Part of the forest region has been set aside for produce that can be used in handicrafts (pandanus and rattan), which it is hoped will spearhead a growth in handicrafts in the future.

To preserve the remaining forest and to revive those areas that have been destroyed, replanting efforts will be made with the sorts of vegetation that grew in the original forests, especially those species that have now become rare. Among them are many trees that can make a contribution to raising the economic level of the people.

Conclusion

From the analysis given above, each of us in our own way will have been able to draw his or her conclusions about the changes that are at present affecting the lives of the Petalangan people of Riau, as well as about the impact that these changes have made. We hope that this society will be able to live in a way that is natural to them, be in a position to live independently, and yet to raise the level of their skills, their standard of living and their prosperity. To strive for this goal it is necessary above all else to continue to pursue every attempt to guide, develop, and preserve the ancestral cultural values of the Petalangan, so that they can maintain their self-respect and their belief in themselves. This will afford them protection against being too easily affected by dubious external influences. Furthermore, it is important that these ancestral values are bruited abroad so that their benefit can be enjoyed by others, some of whom are now also bereft of their own ancestral values. Such steps, little by little, will ensure that the societies classified as *suku asli* and relatively 'backward' (when they are compared to other social groups in Riau) will have a wealth of ancestral values, many of which are no longer possessed by 'advanced' societies. Hopefully, when these particular values have been strengthened by contributions from science and technology, they will prove adequate to provide a life that is rich spiritually and materially.

This is vital as the situation now prevailing in the society is most disquieting, all of their villages and settlements are classified as poverty stricken and backward. In their struggle to maintain their lives, many have been forced to abandon their ancestral values. Should this process be allowed to continue unchecked, it is not unthinkable that men and women will decline into a society that is not only poor at the material level, but has also forsaken its spiritual values. Bearing this sad prospect in mind, all the efforts made by the government and other parties should be supported to the hilt so that they are more unified and more widely spread. Under no circumstances do we wish that this society should become a 'living museum', cut off from other societies, closed to every scientific and technological advancement.

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