

The Development of the Hindu Kaharingan Religion

A New Dayak Religion in Central Kalimantan

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The Hindu Kaharingan religion developed among the Ngaju-Dayak in what is today the Indonesian Province of Central Kalimantan. The Ngaju occupy areas along the southern Barito, the Minor Kapuas, the Kahayan and the Katingan rivers, as well as in parts of the Mentaya. In 1606, Dutch explorers came to Borneo, landing in Banjarmasin, which is in the southern Barito Delta. Only by 1817, however, were they able to occupy parts of the southern Barito, an area of the Bakumpai-Dayak, and Tanah Laut in the Province of South Kalimantan. Why did it take so long to establish a colony?

Although the Dutch possessed iron cannons, they also needed motorized boats if they wanted to control the interior. Southeast Asian Sultanates possessed cannons, but they were cast of bronze or brass and overheated after only a few rounds. The Dutch could fire their iron cannons up to a hundred times without overheating them.¹ They began to use motorized boats in Southeast Asia early in the 19th century. Up until then control was only possible in coastal regions. With motors, during the rainy season they could navigate up the Barito as far as Muara Teweh.

By 1830 security was established to the extent that Europeans could settle in Banjarmasin. Protestant missionaries took advantage of this possibility. But since they had practically no chance to make progress in Islamic areas, they proceeded two/three days up river into the vicinity of what is today Kuala Kapuas and established a mission among the Ngaju-Dayak. By 1849, the missionaries began producing reports and books describing the culture and religion of the Ngaju. Scientists, often German by extraction, followed close behind the missionaries (Becker 1849; Schwaner 1853–54). Two mountain ranges in Central Kalimantan, the Schwaner mountain and the Müller mountain, to this day carry the names of German pioneers.

According to early reports, the Ngaju religion assigned cosmological and geographical features to different deities. For instance, the uppermost heavenly sphere was believed to be controlled by the creator, Hatalla, who in interior areas was also

called Hatara. The name's etymology suggests a Hindu derivation. Mahatara, also specified as Bhat-tara Guru stands for the Hindu God Shiva (Schärer 1946: 16; 1963: 13; Zimmermann 1969: 318, 365). Later, when Dutch control expanded and Moslem influence grew, the name of the Creator God – and so also today the name of the one High God – was Islamized as Hatalla.

The earth's surface and what is underground belonged to the deity Kaloë, a female monster in a shape of a one-breasted toad.² In the course of time Kaloë was replaced by Jata, another riverine deity, who was also female and also in charge of water and the underground (Perelaer 1870: 5 f.). However, Jata also seems to have an Islamic flavor, for sacrifice in her name may not include pork meat, only goat meat (Zimmermann 1969: 317–324). From 1935 until 1960 the Ngaju venerated two high and central deities in parallel: Hatalla, the deity of the sky and Jata, the deity of water and the "underworld" (Baier 2006: 5; Schärer 1946: 22; 1963: 19).

During the colonial era other deities were also venerated, for instance Pataho, founder and protector of villages (Baier 2006: 13). Especially during head-hunting one placed oneself under his protection since Pataho was also in charge of war and defence. Even today one may come up against traces of him in Central Kalimantan, in the form of model houses placed on stilts in his name. Often inside such a hut exotic objects can be found: for instance, a monkey-skull, a curiously shaped stone, or an object from a shipwreck (Kühnle-Degeler 1924: 111–114).

About twenty years ago I discovered the rusty replica of a cannon in such a hut. Perhaps it was possible, so I thought, to see if it came from a Portuguese or a Dutch ship. But suddenly an old woman stood behind me and suggested I offer a bottle of beer to this cannon. Puzzled, I asked, why beer? This was an alcoholic beverage, therefore *haram* to Islam. To this she replied that the cannon was "Western"; and that it was her family's Pataho who wanted beer for it, just as any "Westerner" would.

There are other deities, such as Sahor, Bapa Sangumang, Indu Sangumang, and others, who watch over different aspects of human life, like health, or wealth and well-being. Most important, however, is the mighty Tempon Telon, who watches over the souls of the dead in the afterworld.³ This deity is held in higher regard than the Creator God

² Baier 2006: 3; see also the name of the town Kluwa in South Kalimantan.

³ Lumholtz 1920/I: 23; Schärer n. d.: 131; Ugang 1983: 10.

¹ Pers. comm., Heeresmuseum in Leiden, 1983.

Mahatalla. So important is Tempon Telon that his followers call themselves the Babuhan (community) of Tempon Telon. Moreover, today Tempon Telon is considered the equal of Shiva, as the god of destruction and dissolution (Baier 2006: 17). Likewise, the creator Mahatalla was not as almighty and unchanging a century earlier as he is now. He had power only as long as he possessed “the water of life,” Danum Kaharingan, which ensured rejuvenation (Zimmermann 1969: 317–324).

Throughout the Dutch era there was religious freedom for everyone; only head-hunting, slave sacrifice, and cruelty to animals, as they occurred during death feasts, were forbidden. Later, during the Japanese occupation, it was policy to erase all remnants of Western colonialism. For the first time native religion was taken seriously, on a par with high religion. From 1943, a general movement towards Japanization took place (Bigler 1947; Baier 1998: 51). Native priests were encouraged to reintroduce or maintain their old rituals. Educated *adat* specialists and Christian Ngaju reverted back to animism, foremost among them Tjilik Riwt, who later, in 1957, became the first Indonesian governor of the new Province of Central Kalimantan. A medical nurse during colonial times and a Christian employee of the Mission Hospital in Kuala Kapuas, he became, in Japanese times, a professed animist and practicing priest. Already in 1945, the Japanese had urged him to give his religion a new name.

Spontaneously he chose the name Kaharingan. Its etymology derived from ritual language and the concept of *haring* which means “to exist by oneself, without foreign influence” (Ugang 1983: 10–12; cf. “Danum Kaharingan”). As the Hindu Kaharingan religion explains it today, Kaharingan means “living,” “a source of life stemming from God.”⁴ The new name spread throughout Kalimantan after 1945. At present it is presumed to be the official name for all extant Dayak religions of Indonesia, more exactly for what survives of them, specially in Central Kalimantan and along the borders to West and East Kalimantan (Tunjung-, Benuaq-Dayak), as well as in the Meratus mountains of South Kalimantan.

Encouraged by developments during the Japanese occupation, adherents of Kaharingan organized a conference. During 1950 they met in Central Kalimantan near Palangka Raya where they resolved to maintain Kaharingan as the official name of their faith. Simultaneously they established a political party, the Sarikat Kaharingan Da-

yak Indonesia (Schiller 1997: 117). But they still had a long way to go before the new religion became official. Before Indonesia was ready to grant formal approval, a number of conditions had to be met. The state permitted only one ideology, namely Pancasila which embraced one Almighty God. How can a worldview, which believes in many gods and spirits, satisfy this stipulation? Tjilik Riwt was aware of this problem. In a publication locally distributed during 1953, he acknowledged that Kaharingan knew only one God by name of Ranying (Riwut 1953: 5). However Ranying is only a honorific for the Creator God Ranying Hatalla Langit. This Ranying occupies the seventh, or highest, heavenly sphere, jointly with his “angels,” the “dewas,” and “Sangiang.” By way of explanation, Riwt in this instance refers to the sister or wife of Hatalla. For the first time he manipulates, in writing, the ranking of Ranying Hatalla Langit so that he can appear similar in status to the God in Islam or Christianity; a God without family, wife, or children. The original family members were degraded to angels.

Marked changes took place too in the cost of sacrifices, especially in the Tiwah Feasts of the Dead. Before the Dutch occupation it was necessary, at least for the leading families, to offer slaves (these were mostly bought at the slave market). In 1859 the Dutch forbade this practice and only buffaloes were allowed to be offered. In the fifties and sixties the death rituals experienced competition from the much cheaper rituals of Islam and Christianity. According to Dr. Sri Kuhnt-Saptodewo, after the eighties only hens were required to be offered at the Tiwah Feast of the Dead.⁵

Ever since Indonesia started its “Orde Baru,” every citizen was formally required to belong to a recognized religious community. Five were permitted: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Those adhering to Kaharingan had to adapt further, for in 1979, when their faith last failed recognition, they were still unable to conform to the following requirements laid down: 1) that their belief knew only one God; 2) that a holy book or script was present; 3) that a special building for religious services was present; and 4) that a set number of yearly feast days were ordered.

The changes which Tjilik Riwt had begun to make the religion acceptable were carried further and included these adaptations.

4 *Sumber kehidupan dengan kuasa Ranying Hatalla Langit* (Lembaga ... 2003: 1 [A.b. al 1]).

5 Maks 1861: 494; Kuhnt-Saptodewo 1993: 75, 78: After questioning and receiving inadequate information, I find this doubtful; cf. also Schiller 1997: 124.

1) The Creator God, Ranying Hatalla Langit, was declared an almighty, most holy, and elevated deity. Naturally he was also all-knowing, mysterious, and everlasting (Baier 2006: 15f.). He became more like the Hindu Trimurti, who is creator and simultaneously supporter and destroyer of all life. Like Trimurti, Ranying Hatalla Langit penetrates, fills, and completes the world and the cosmos and is one with them. Jata, the Ngaju deity of water and the underworld, was degraded to become a manifestation of Ranying Hatalla Langit. All other deities, spirits, spirit-like beings, or “lords in heaven” were similarly degraded, either as manifestations of the creator or else as angels, prophets, or jinns (Baier 2006: 17–19). As far as comparison with Islam went, Ranying Hatalla Langit was equal to Allah: owing to his everlasting, esoteric perfection; no human being can adequately describe him. The qualification “all-loving,” with which he was also endowed, may have been modelled on Christianity.

2) A holy book. The Dutch scientist Mallinckrodt and the Swiss theologian Schärer before the Second World War proposed that genealogies of deities, spirits, spirit-like beings, as well as of ancestral spirits and human ancestors were an integral part of the Ngaju creation myth. The two scholars had compiled and interpreted this in accordance with the recitals of Ngaju ritual specialists (Mallinckrodt and Mallinckrodt-Djata 1928; Schärer 1946, 1963). Their creation myth, available in print before the colonial phase ended, was that of the Kapuas and lower Kahayan area. However, the individuals who later promoted Kaharingan as a high religion came from the middle reaches of the Kahayan. Therefore, in 1973, they readapted the existing Middle-Kahayan myth to their own purposes. In 1996, at Palangka Raya, where the final version of the myth was formally agreed upon by a committee of leaders representing all Kaharingan communities, it was printed and made available as a holy text entitled “Panaturan. Tamparan Taluh Handiai” viz. “The Origins. The Source of All Being.” If one compares this with earlier versions, a number of discrepancies and manipulations become apparent. For instance, the new text, among other things, refers to confusion of languages and the building of a tower, just as the Koran and the Bible have it (Genesis 11), a detail which is entirely missing in earlier Ngaju references (*Majelis* ... 1996: 172).

3) Until the 1970s a building for religious services, which were held every week did not exist in Central Kalimantan, and this is still so in the far interior, where a “hall” (*balai*) is built only for burial feasts. The first building for regular services (*balai*

basarah)⁶ was erected in Palangka Raya some thirty years ago. Every Thursday evening the community congregates for a short ritual with recitals and sermon, song and collection. The particular day of the week, however, for Kaharingan service may vary. In Pendreh, close to Muara Teweh on the Barito, the community meets on Friday mornings. Women take part in meetings and also share ritual duties. Other services are performed incidentally and on feast days. The Indonesian government subsidizes the erection of a *balai basarah*.

4) Regular feast days. The curriculum for secondary schools recommends three feast days per year.⁷ First, the “agricultural day” after the May harvest is a thanksgiving feast with rest, cleaning, and blessing of agricultural tools. Deified ancestors are asked during a service to render their blessing for the coming season. The second is a “cultural day,” when the gift of knowledge and culture is credited to Bawi Ayah, a deity similar to Saraswati, the Hindu equivalent of Bawi Ayah in Bali. The third feast is a day of “general thanksgiving” for the blessings the community received during the previous year. Rituals in honour of Pataho, founder of communities, are performed at his shrines. Complete rest from work is an important requirement. This practice was also apparently influenced by the Balinese Nyepi day.⁸

In May 1980, when the Kaharingan community obtained official recognition by the state government, not as Indonesia’s sixth religion but as a branch of Hinduism, the name Hindu Kaharingan was formalized. Direction and competence of decision were delegated to the Great Council of the Hindu Kaharingan Religion in Palangka Raya. A local Hindu Kaharingan academy became an official educational state institution. Hundreds of religious teachers are trained there. The state also formally subsidizes this teaching via the leaders of the Hindu communities in Bali. So it was not until the visit in 2001 of President Abdulrahman Wahid in Palangka Raya that money was given to

6 Apparently A. Schiller took some unqualified informants to explain the etymology and history of the word *basarah*, to conduct a religious worship (2005: 117f.). According to these informants the word *basarah* is derived from *basara*, to litigate. First, Schiller does not notice that *basarah* is written and in Malayan languages spoken with *-h*, *basara* without *-h*! Secondly, *basara* is derived from *bicara*, *bichara*, to talk (Hardeland 1859; Bingan and Ibrahim 1997: 29; Schärer 1946: 11; Wilkinson 1959/I: 135), and *bisarah* is a loanword from the Indonesian root *serah*, thus *menyerahkan diri* (like the Arabic root and meaning of “Islam”).

7 It is not yet adopted (March 2006).

8 Lembaga ... 2003 in Baier 2006: 20; Zimmermann 1969: 358.

the Great Council of the Kaharingans. Only during the past few years was it possible to formally employ teachers and to erect subsidized buildings for Hindu Kaharingan services in Kalimantan.

It is remarkable to see how positive and self-conscious Kaharingans currently are in their interior villages. "We are Hindus," they proclaim. Likewise, people in Palangka Raya are proud of being part of a Hindu world community. "In October [2004], when a Krishna world congress takes place in the USA, our people will be there!" The Kaharingan curriculum for high schools claims that "The Hindu Kaharingan Religion has no beginning. It has always been present, ever since there have been humans. In fact, 'Kaharingan' equals life. Together with the first human beings it came down to earth ... it gives direction and faith to all mankind."

Two passages of Ngaju death rituals may serve to explain the development which has taken place. The first (Citation 1) was formulated some 80–100 years ago, written down as cited by religious functionaries, some three months after the death of an individual ready for burial (Schärer 1966: 495, 507). The second (Citation 2) was formalized 30–40 years ago, as recited by a Kaharingan representative of a local community, while the body to be buried still remained at home (*Majelis* ... 1974: 14–16 [shortened]). Both quotations speak for themselves. Can the Ngaju prayers of a century ago be compared with the Kaharingan prayers of the present, or does the new ritual appear closer to modern, monotheistic rituals as we know them?

Citation 1: "You – the souls of the dead, as you rest by the stepping stone, close the entrance door to the house of the hornbill; you – who lounge there like fallen leaves by the stone, close to the anchorage, the place for boats and water snakes; you – pray, turn back, and lead us to the mountain home of the coffins, to the hill where the dead reside ... May our handfuls of rice quickly rise up to the dew-clouds and return from there as a shower ..." These words and many more like them are addressed not to one almighty God, but to spirit-like beings, whom one commands, rather than pleads, to respond. Such texts can only be understood by individuals familiar with the ritual language and the mythology of the native community concerned.

Citation 2: "Ranying Hatalla Langit, with this prayer we commend unto you this soul hoping it will be accepted. We pray asking you, the Almighty, to lend us your golden boat for the Liau at the grave site of our village. Ranying Hatalla Langit, grant us your forgiveness and love, forever, to us, your community, during lifetime the home of the soul of this deceased. Let the water of life rain

down on all of us, so that we may continue to share a long life on earth, be wealthy and happy. Ranying Hatalla Langit, protect us from sickness and grant us means [magic] to survive, for you are almighty, you have more power than all kings together. Our prayer has only few words; it is short so that its soul may return to us directly!" To conclude, three times a *kurr* is uttered (as if calling chickens) that the soul for whom the prayers are recited may return. The final word "sahij" for "amen" marks the end. This second passage seems to bear similarities to the Lord's Prayer of Protestant Christians praising the Lord and asking for assistance.

Although single elements, ways of expression, words, and names may derive from ancient, native belief, Hindu Kaharingan deserves to be called a new religion, one that was shaped by modern, educated individuals. They adapted to the demands of their culture, to those of the state and to others elsewhere in the modern world. This new religion takes its place in Indonesia. It developed from tribal religion into a high religion. At the beginning of the 21st century it became Indonesia's largest, now monotheistic, tribal religion with nearly 200,000 believers. Hindu Kaharingan is well respected, influential, and progressive. It had to go a long way to achieve this.

This is a slightly revised version of an address to representatives of sundry religious communities on 10 March 2006 in Tarakan (East Kalimantan). It was as part of a series of discussions which President Abdulrahman Wahid recommended in 2001 to be held in all capitals of the governmental districts of Indonesia as a means to prevent religious hatred (Forum Komunikasi Umat Antar Umat Beragama). Tarakan has a liberal policy as regards religion.

The statement is also an abstract of a more detailed description of the Hindu Kaharingan Religion, entitled "Dari Agama Politeisme ke Agama Ketuhanan Yang Esa" in a work edited by Hermogenes Ugang (Balai Penerbit Pontianak Amu Lanu).

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***Serinta* behind the Traditional Poetry of the Alor People of Belagar and Pandai in Pantar, Eastern Indonesia**

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This article addresses the local concept of *serinta*, stories or narratives implied in the composition of customary poetry. *Serinta* is a term recognized by the population of Alor,¹ Pandai, and Barnusa (peoples speaking the Lamaholot language in the version known locally as Senaing) and Belagar (speaking the Belagar language) on the islands of Pantar and Alor in eastern Indonesia. In reference to such a poem the Alor people will ask, *liang te neng serinta mari pai*, and the people of Belagar will ask, *dar u e serinta hura tarang*, both meaning “what is the story behind that poem?” On the other hand they may ask concerning a narrative or historical account what customary poem serves as its validation or confirmation. Among these peoples a history will be regarded as untrue if it is not accompanied by a traditional poem as confirmation, while such a poem must in turn have its own story. Domestic or foreign researchers who wish to investigate social

1 Not the island of Alor, but the population speaking the language indicated on the western end of the Kabola Peninsula of that island.