



## The ecology-based myths in Karo's folktales

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### Abstract

Ecology-based myths might refer to environment-based expressions that can be used as a vehicle to be close to the local environment and Karo people are rich of such expressions. This study is aimed at making an inventory of myths in Juhar Subdistrict, Karo Regency and at classifying them. The approach of literary ecology and the concept of myth are used in this paper. The ecological studies of literary works meet the ecology with literary works so the ecological paradigm of literary studies are meant to apply the ecological approach to literary works appreciation. The research methods are qualitative and inventory as well as the use of noting, recording, and interviewing techniques. The results show that there are ten ecological myths which are classified into the myths of soil and stone, plants and animals, and magical creatures.

**Keywords:** Karo people, ecological myth, literary ecology, folktale

### 1. Introduction

Karo Batak as one of the indigenous ethnics in North Sumatra can be categorized as a small-scale society but it has unique tradition like the nurunken kalak mate cawir metua <sup>[1]</sup>. Myths might have local wisdoms that should be understood and learned. Local wisdoms as part of cultural values avail in the community and they could inherit peace and welfare... in the local communities in the ancient times <sup>[2]</sup>. Ecology is a combination of two Greek words, i.e. *oikos* 'home' and *logos* 'science or learning'. Thus, ecology is the study of the mutual relationship between living things and their environment <sup>[3]</sup>, the science between organism and its environment <sup>[4]</sup>, and a discipline that examines the relationship of organisms or groups of organisms, such as humans, animals, plants, to their environment <sup>[5]</sup>. Myth is an oral narrative, or the story which is told from mouth to ears or transmitted orally <sup>[6]</sup>. Meanwhile, the term *folk literature* refers to all collectively scattering stories <sup>[7]</sup>. On the basis of this definition it can be argued that the ecological myths means the ones which have relationship between man and his environment.

Folklore associated with ecological myth is examined with literary ecological studies. This paper analyzes the relationship of literature, human, and environment. Endraswara also argued literary ecology is point of view to understand environmental problems in the literary perspective <sup>[8]</sup>. Folktales often portray the myths of life, especially the main characters. Many environmental myths are revealed in folklore, including in the Karonese folklore. Literary ecology can be a medium to search for folklore that has the nuance of ecological or environmental (or natural) myths. Keraf stated that in the *adat* people, the obligation not to disturb nature is usually maintained and appreciated through taboos <sup>[9]</sup>. For example, nature (or it could also be stones or certain trees) is sacred so it should not be tampered with so taboo here is a form of negative worshipping rite.

Collecting ecological myths is important because it implies that the essence of myths is not only a fairy tale, but also can it become an environmental wisdom which is capable of giving a positive influence. The traces of ecological myths can still be found in Karo's folklore and it requires good understandings on the literary ecology study that there is a mutual relationship between men and their natural surroundings. That is, humans and the environment as the literary living space affect each other. Sukatman argued myth serves to continue and stabilize the culture, to present life guidelines, to endorse cultural activities, to give meaning to human life, and to provide a model of knowledge to explain things that do not make sense <sup>[10]</sup>.

### 2. Methods

This research uses qualitative method Bungin, focusing on the various phenomena of existing social reality by revealing characteristics, characteristics, models, signs, or images of certain conditions, situations, or phenomena. Data collection in this research is done by recording and record techniques, documentation, and structured interviews <sup>[11]</sup>. The research was carried out in Karo Regency in which we collected both primary and secondary data. The data analysis was based on the Miles and Huberman covering three stages of interactive models, namely data reduction, data presentation and verification and involving logical and realistic interpretations, and literary ecology approach <sup>[12]</sup>.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 The Karo's richness of ecology-based myths

1. **Patung Pulu Balang in Kutambaru:** The folklore of Patung Pulu Balang (or Pulu Balang Statue) told about the belief of Kutambaru residents on the statue that could protect livestock from thieves. However, unluckily, thieves kept coming and residents blamed at the statue.

Then, heavy rain fell so that floods hit the village, however, such natural disasters seemed to bring benefits that the residents respected and worshiped the statue anymore.

2. **The preceptor (or Guru) Diden:** There was a powerful preceptor in Karo named Guru Diden. Seven preceptors from Pakpak Pitu Sedalanen felt curious and rivaled and they wanted to test Diden's power, but their hands were even trapped in the soil. Diden with his magic released their hands and they then surrendered. But what happened then was that from the place the hands were trapped appeared the splashing water from seven holes. The water sprang in speed and continuously until it walked away.
3. **Si Beru Dayang and the origin of rice in Karo:** There was an orphan girl named Si Beru Dayang who was considered a figure who brought down rice as humans' food, therefore, rice was highly respected and the people in Karo land were obedient to the prohibitions and orders related to the contents of the myth. Residents continued to adore Si Beru Dayang with a ritual called *mere page*. When the ritual was held, people were forbidden to work in the fields for two days; they had to be relax for two consecutive days to worship Si Beru Dayang because they got good harvest.
4. **Si Ilang-ilang:** The *Si Ilang-ilang* was tall like a giant. His mother was ill and he had to look for the top leaves (*daun pucuk*) of yellow pumpkin and cooked them in order her mother recovered from bad illness. Then, the leaves were placed on her mother's body but unluckily, she then died. The *Si Ilang-ilang* is believed to appear if, for example, a resident obtains richness by unfavorable means.
5. **Beru Renggang Kuning:** The *Beru Renggang Kuning* (or the Yellow Beru Renggang) myth told about a girl named Renggang Kuning who was accustomed to doing strange things but she soon changed after her father gave advice to her to seek knowledge. One night, a group of bandits came into her house but she could do nothing. Since then, she promised to herself to give priority to her relatives as what her mother (or *nande*) ever said: "Whatever may prevail in this world and the earth never distinguishes between goodness and the evil; wherever you stand, do your best." She then closed the windows after chanting prayer to Sinabung mountain.
6. **Beru Ginting Sopo Mbelin:** The *Beru Ginting Sopo Mbelin* told about a girl who was left by her parents who died because her uncle and aunt wanted to take control over her parents' richness. Unluckily, she was then sold to a merchant who was her uncle and aunt's friend. Then, she was abandoned at a place that she did not know how to reach her home but she forced herself to look for a road to come home. On her way home she encountered many people who were so kind to her and animals which did not attack her until she met an old woman named Rubia Gande who adopted her to be her daughter.
7. **Pawang Ternalem:** The Pawang Ternalem (or Ternalem the Diviner) was about a child who was not accepted by society because he was born on a bad day. People believed that when a baby was born on a bad day then he/she had be killed because he/she could bring bad luck

to their village. His neighbours tried to kill him but they always failed. Finally, he was raised by Datuk Rubia Gande who taught him how to use his inner power (or *ilmu kanuragan*). After being successful to obtain such knowledge, Pawang Ternalem was able to help his community from illness.

8. **Jangak:** It was told that Jangak was believed to be an assistance giver when someone was difficult in financial condition. The person who got such assistance was usually someone who was considered kind and helpful to others. Jangak was a mysterious creature.
9. **Cincin Pinta-Pinta:** The Cincin Pinta-Pinta (or Pinta-pinta Ring) told about the Bunga Ncole (or Ncole Flower) who was a daughter of Pengulu Juma Raja. Due to much debt from gambling, the Raja was bankrupt and had to live in the forest. When Ncole's parents died, she was alone; nobody took care of her. A snake came to her and gave a ring that she could use whenever she needed a request.
10. **Palas Sipitu Ruang:** The Palas Sipitu Ruang myth told about the King Umang who had built a house which was named Si Pitu Ruang or Palas Sipitu Ruang finally married and had a daughter. Someday, the Umang's parents-in-law came to the house to see their granddaughter. When they were about to go home, King Umang sent advice via his wife to his parents-in-law not look behind. However, because of their curiosity, they looked behind when leaving the house. Suddenly, the house disappeared except sixteen pillars of stones that stood in rectangle formation. Their granddaughter changed to stone and the King Umang and his wife disappeared without traces.

### 3.2 Ecology-based myths in Karo's folktale

1. **Myths of earth and stones:** The myth of earth and stones could be found in Karo's *Guru Diden*, *Palas Si Pitu Ruang*, and *Patung Pulu Balang* folktales which show that Karo people love their natural environment. The earth and stones become the symbols of power. In the first myth (*Guru Diden*) the earth becomes the symbol of force that can suck something and then spray water. In *Palas Si Pitu Ruang*, the earth and stones are believed to have a miracle of bringing something to life and destroying something. Then, in the third myth (*Patung Pulu Balang*) the earth and stones are believed that cattles are safe from theft. With the myths, local people are expected to maintain their environment.
2. **Myths of plants and animals:** The ecological myths that involve plants and animals are found in the *Beru Dayang* and the *Origin of Rice in Karo Land*, and *Cincin Pinta-Pinta* in which such natural elements must be maintained. If being ignored, they can bring calamities to humans. Conversely, if humans keep plants and animals, they will gain abundance of benefits, for instance the first myth (*Beru Dayang and the Origin of Rice in the Land of Karo*) teaches humans to appreciate the plants, namely rice and as a result, people get good harvests. Meanwhile, the *Cincin Pinta-Pinta* myth shows that if human beings are good to animals and believe that all animals basically do not attack humans if they are loved; animals can send

signal to humans. The signals can be either good or bad, depending on the humans' behaviors.

3. **Myth of sacred creature:** Ecological myths are not only limited to the environmental elements such as soil, plants, stones, and others, but also can they relate to creatures like humans and jinns. The myths of magical creatures are found in the *Jangak*, *Pawang Ternalem*, *Si Ilang-ilang*, *Beru Renggang Kuning*, and *Beru Ginting Sopo Mbelin*. These five folklores show that magical beings can appear in any forms, either in frightening or in pleasant creatures who give good or bad news. The *Jangak*, for example was a helpful but unknown creature whose shape was not ever seen. The *Pawang Ternalem* myth is about the supernatural power that can help human beings and the *Si Ilang-ilang* myth is believed to be a creature that will come if there are people who get their property in unmannered way. The *Beru Ginting Sopo Mbelin* and *Beru Renggang Kuning* myths show their similarity, due to the existence of human's struggle in maintaining their life after they were thrown by their families. These folktales show that truth and goodness give paths victory. All the folktales certainly educate people to always maintain their behaviors.

#### 4. Conclusions

It is concluded that the Karo's ecological myths are proved to contain the themes of soil, stones, plants, animals, and magical creatures. The myths should be generated to today's generations in order they get significant lessons from their ancestors about how to behave and to look after environment.

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