

Ngalai: A Healing Ritual of Kota Belud's Bajau Society

ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of ngalai ritual in Kota Belud, Sabah. The main objective of this discussion is to document the traditional performance which is present still among older generation the west coast Sabah Bajau. The paper was written based on field work carried out at Sembirai village, Kota Belud for a month. The interview was conducted among the healers related to the abstinences and the materials used during the ceremony. Therefore, this study explores the ngalai as a ritualistic performance for healing that revolves the relationship between behaviour and culture. This healing ritual is performed because it is believed that there are conflicts between human nature and the invisible world. These conflicts in turn raises the 'ire' of supernatural beings. As a result, humans are exposed to diseases that are incurable by modern medicine. The ngalai ritual is believed to be an alternative to such adverse circumstances. Ngalai seen as a treatment for physical and spiritual diseases suffered by the human body. The Kota Belud Bajaus also believe this to be a way to persuade the spirits around them to refrain from causing bringing catastrophe to individuals and the entire of society. Therefore, culture and belief system of the Bajau play an important role in the way they perceive their health, behavior and responses to the diseases and treatment. This ritual specifically demonstrates the use and the practice as part of the traditional medicine culture that is also practiced among other societies in Malaysia, such as the healing of ritual main puteri/teri in Kelantan.