

The Sabu Tribe's Concept of Culture and Traditions Through the Perspective of Feminist Theology

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CC BY-SA license **Abstract**

This research examines the culture and traditions of the Sabu tribe through a feminist theological perspective to understand how women are positioned in a social system that is often associated with patriarchy. Although injustice against women is still found in various cultural practices in Indonesia, research findings show that *the puru* tradition actually presents the value of equality and respect. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study found that *puru* functions as a protection mechanism for women from harassment, prejudice, and immoral acts. This tradition is in line with the Christian teaching of God's just love and respect for human dignity. Through *puru*, Sabu women gain space to determine their own way of life, develop as a whole person, and enjoy equal rights with men. Thus, women are seen as independent individuals and have control over their existence and future.

Keyword: feminist theology, *puru* culture and tradition, sabu tribe

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji budaya dan tradisi suku Sabu melalui perspektif teologi feminis untuk memahami bagaimana perempuan diposisikan dalam sistem sosial yang kerap diasosiasikan dengan patriarki. Meski ketidakadilan terhadap perempuan masih ditemukan dalam berbagai praktik budaya di Indonesia, temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tradisi *puru* justru menghadirkan nilai kesetaraan dan penghormatan. Menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa *puru* berfungsi sebagai mekanisme perlindungan bagi perempuan dari pelecehan, prasangka, dan tindakan tidak bermoral. Tradisi ini sejalan dengan ajaran Kristen tentang kasih Allah yang adil dan penghormatan terhadap martabat manusia. Melalui *puru*, perempuan Sabu memperoleh ruang untuk menentukan jalan hidup mereka sendiri, berkembang sebagai pribadi yang utuh, dan menikmati hak yang setara dengan laki-laki. Dengan demikian, perempuan dipandang sebagai individu yang mandiri dan memiliki kendali atas keberadaan serta masa depan mereka.

Kata kunci: teologi feminis, budaya dan tradisi *puru*, suku sabu

Introduction

In a patriarchal society, women are treated poorly in social, political, economic, and religious settings. This imbalance is sometimes caused by the way work is divided by gender, which connects women's roles, particularly those of mothers and wives, to their home duties. These kinds of situations frequently make women feel like they are on the outside and less important, which takes away their freedom. The patriarchal culture of Indonesia makes it hard for women to work, raise families, and be part of society (Tampilang et al., 2024; Wijaya, 2017). The subordinate status of women can consequently result in their exploitation and violence, manifesting in both private and public domains. The theory of nature posits that the distinctions in roles between men and women are fundamentally grounded in biology, leading to a prevailing dominance of men over women (Firestone, 1970). These distinctions unequivocally affirm that men and women are inherently different in both biological and theological aspects. The presence of gender theory delineates the roles, duties, and trends between men and women as a component of the theory of functional structures within social theory (Alfarel & Farah, 2024).

The issue of gender injustice is closely related to our understanding of the role of gender in society, especially in some places in Indonesia. Gender refers to the different social responsibilities and roles given to men and women, shaped by cultural norms. These standard tasks associated with each gender are known as gender roles (Ayu, 2023). This division of labor is not simply a reflection of biological differences, but has evolved into a set of cultural values that describe the different roles of men and women in social relationships.

On the contrary, the culture of the Sabu tribe exemplifies the deviation from the secondary of this woman. Here, customs place a strong emphasis on equality, as highlighted during the engagement ceremony by both sides of the family. The alternative culture applied by the culture of the methamphetamine tribe, shows the equality of men and women while opening up space for men and women to participate in services without discrimination (Haba & Yohanessa, 2023). This commitment to equality is evident in the jointly managed household responsibilities between husband and wife, which reflect a complementary relationship rather than a hierarchical relationship.

The Sabu tribe operates in a patrilineal framework where a wife is considered a member of her husband's clan, there is protection against unfair treatment of women. If a husband fails to fulfill his responsibilities to his wife or his household, his family can intervene and sue him back. This action serves as a protective measure for the child's household. Women's families ensure that the role of wives runs according to their shared commitment, namely to be loved and treated fairly. The actions carried out by the Sabu people are known as *puru* customs, which are an important element of the *Kenoto* custom, the marriage tradition of the Sabu people (Bire et al., 2023). This *puru* custom consists of two different parts: one that occurs during *kenoto* and the other that occurs after death. Marriage in *Kenoto* culture is loaded with moral values, including the spirit of togetherness, fairness, politeness, respect for parents, affection, mutual respect, and other values related to the Sabu culture (Sioh, 2020).

During *kenoto*, *puru* signifies that the female clan is in harmony with the male clan. In contrast, *puru* at the time of death involves a woman's clan returning to her original bloodline, a process that recognizes the woman's return to her family inheritance after her husband's death. In essence, the *puru* custom embodies the concept of clan transition in the Sabu society. The goal is to replenish what has been vacant from the woman's family and if it is not done, it is understood that there will be an imbalance or disharmony between the woman and also the two sides of the family (Hawu Haba, 2021).

This custom is carried out when the husband, who is considered the head of the household, dies. Usually, the *puru* custom is carried out before the funeral, before the husband's body is buried. Before this ceremony took place, there was a discussion between the husband and wife's family. During the funeral, family representatives announced to relatives and members of the assembled community that, according to tradition, the woman's status had been restored to her original clan, thus allowing her to return to her family home. This tradition is a form of protection for Sabu women from various acts of violence and discrimination that they may experience (Thomas et al., 2024).

The implementation of the *puru* custom is influenced by the prevailing circumstances and ultimately depends on mutual agreement among the families involved. This tradition has a deep meaning and value that the Sabu people want to uphold, ensuring that the practice continues in their community. For the Sabu people, this tradition is not just a ceremony or celebration; rather, these traditions embody deep meanings and noble principles that guide their daily lives. This reflects the interconnectedness of the Sabu community, which highlights the mutually supportive relationship among its members.

The *Puru* tradition of the Sabu Tribe, which includes various traditional rituals such as weddings, births, and funerals, began to be neglected due to the influence of foreign cultures that were more easily accepted by the community. Many young couples tend to opt for a more practical and efficient lifestyle, which often does not reflect traditional values loaded with symbolism and deep philosophies. As a result, the younger generation begins to feel alienated from the values that exist in their traditions. *Adat puru* describes how community life can integrate feminine values, such as tenderness and compassion, along with masculine values, such as assertiveness and a sense of belonging, to achieve a goal (Thomas et al., 2024).

Feminist theological approaches to the culture and traditions of the *Puru* Tribe of Sabu can encompass various dimensions related to the position of women in the cultural and religious context of the Sabu tribe. This study will discuss issues related to gender injustice, as well as how feminist theology can offer a more comprehensive insight into the position of women in the social, cultural, and religious structures of the *Puru* Sabu tribe. The author aims to dig deeper into this custom and its implications in the Sabu society. So the author came up with the title "The Cultural Concept and Tradition of the *Puru* Tribe of Sabu in the Lens of Feminist Theology."

Research Methods

In this study, the authors used a descriptive research methodology to collect detailed and accurate information, aiming to clearly outline the symptoms and identify the underlying problems. A description of the plan to help researchers describe or modify their research so that later, this can facilitate the tasks of others who want to know about their research (Manurung, 2022). The study describes research problems in society, as well as the procedures that apply to community greetings and specific situations, including the relationship of activities, attitudes, opinions and processes that are being carried out and the effects of phenomena (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023).

Using a qualitative approach, this study seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the subjects involved, including their behaviors, actions, and perceptions, all of which are presented in a rich descriptive format. The purpose of the research is to identify potentials and challenges, understand the meaning and peculiarities of the object being studied, explore social processes and interactions, and delve into the feelings of other individuals (Safarudin et al., 2023). This exploration is carried out in a specific natural context, using a variety of organic methods to gather insights. To facilitate this process, the authors combined several data collection techniques across the study. The data analysis carried out refers to the Miles and Huberman model, which begins with collecting data, then reducing the data, and ending with the presentation of Conclusions (Saadah et al., 2022).

Research Results and Discussion

Christology from a Feminist Perspective as the liberation of methamphetamine women

Feminist theologians about Christ emphasize that Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed rather than redemption through suffering. Feminist theology expands the flow of women's liberation by incorporating gender perspectives. This theology is actively engaged in the struggle for women's full humanity and rightful place in history, in line with the mandate of Jesus, which not only offers liberation but also empowers the individual. Although men and women may be biologically different, these differences do not require that their social roles also have to be different. In fact, their roles can remain the same, but the way they fulfill these roles can vary. Feminist Christianity understands the teachings and actions of Jesus as an attempt to liberate and acknowledge the existence of women in the face of existing patriarchal structures (Tinambunan et al., 2025).

This branch of theology seeks to free itself from the constraints of the patriarchal system and foster a new relationship characterized by equality, recognizing all as fellow creations of God and brothers of Jesus. Feminist theology is rooted in a commitment to understanding faith in God, as expressed through Jesus Christ, from the unique perspective of women's experiences. Christ serves as a link between God and mankind. He was the successor of the family. He became a mediator for the extended family when there was a conflict. It is the same with Christ who is present in the world to establish peace between man and God (Lele et al., 2021) Feminist theologians recognize that this understanding will never be complete, because God remains a mystery.

Nonetheless, the aspiration to deepen their relationship with God as women of faith encourages them to engage actively in theology not only for their own benefit, but also for the well-

being of others. Feminist theology affirms that theological inquiry must be accompanied by a resolute effort to challenge and overcome elements that are contrary to the essence of the Christian mandate, which affirms the inherent dignity of each individual.

The culture of methamphetamine in feminist theology

The Puru culture within the Sabu tribe served as a foundation for organizing and enhancing feminist ideals, which played an important role in theological discourse. This perspective highlights the lives and experiences of women who are traditionally seen as members of lower-class society.

Feminist theology offers a unique lens through which women can articulate their faith, emphasizing God's commitment to those who are marginalized and oppressed. Our Lord is a liberating, loving, and just god who fights for the rights of the oppressed.

By cultivating gender awareness, both men and women can gain insight into the inequality, injustice, and violence that permeate our lives. This shared understanding empowers them to work together in the pursuit of justice, equality, and peace, honoring God's creation, which reflects His image and likeness.

History of Puru Customs

According to Mr. Maratu Dima (Figure/Spokesperson of the Sabu Custom), the meaning of puru refers to the return of the status of the wife to her family of origin, in this case the woman's family. The puru custom occurs when the husband as the head of the family dies. Not different from this understanding, Mr. Maratu Dima (Figure/Spokesperson of Sabu Customs) also said that the puru custom is part of the Sabu custom related to the life of husband and wife where when the husband dies, the custom must be implemented.

Indeed, there is no clear information on when this custom first appeared, either orally or in writing. However, it is said that the puru custom itself has existed since the ancestors of the Sabu people. The history of the presence of the Puru custom is part of the Sabu culture pioneered by the ancestors of the Sabu people, to create a home life that has been separated due to death and always establishes a good relationship of affection and family. Therefore, the puru custom was created so that love life remains intertwined in family relationships until the next generation and beyond.

The history of the Puru Custom is also inseparable from the Kenoto Traditional procession, in this custom there is an agreement that has been mutually agreed upon by the men and the women. The agreement is that if the husband as the head of the family dies, then the family of the woman/wife will come to request that the girl be returned to her original clan.

Puru Background

It is still closely related to the culture of the Sabu community, namely adultery. Where when the wife has carried out the custom and remarried, then she did not commit adultery with her previous marriage. However, when the young woman/wife does not perform Puru and remarries

another man, then for the culture of the Sabu society, the woman has committed adultery in her previous marriage.

This has been in the conversation on the customary mat which states that the family, the woman/wife, will ask for it back. In other words, the procession has existed from the ancestors and is an obligation of the Sabu community which is carried out for generations.

Implementation of Puru Customs

The implementation of the puru custom itself is carried out before the funeral procession or funeral of the body. The implementation was approximately in the morning at around 08.00 or 10.00 local time to discuss the return of the women's clan from the men's family. During the customary process, no special symbols or objects are installed, held and needed as a condition for its implementation.

Before carrying out the puru customary procession, there must first be a deliberation or notification to both parties of the family (male & female) who are responsible that the custom will be carried out. After the traditional procession is completed, at the time of burial (when the body will be put into the burial pit) one of the representatives of the family can convey to the general public, both relatives and the people present, that according to custom, the status of the woman (wife) has been revealed/transferred to her clan of origin.

Participants in the Puru Ceremony

The participants of the Puru ceremony are those who are struggling with grief. This tradition is carried out on the morning before the funeral, when the family gathers to invite all related parties in particular, those responsible for the deceased husband and wife, as well as others of the same clan.

This procession usually involves relatives such as parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, close relatives, and nuclear families from both sides.

According to Mrs. Maria Bhahi, a well-known Sabu traditional spokesperson in melolo, the traditional spokesperson also plays an important role in the Puru ceremony. This intermediary helps facilitate communication between the two families. During the procession, the spokesperson articulated a mutually agreed decision regarding the widow's life after her husband's death.

The spokesperson's duties include conveying widowhood status to male relatives and children, ensuring that she is treated with the same respect and attention as she was treated as long as her husband is alive. This role is important, as the spokesperson has the authority to convey important information and facilitate dialogue during the Puru process.

It is important to note that the conversations arranged by the spokesperson are rooted in a shared understanding of the deceased's biological children and their families. In addition, the presence of each family member can provide input and suggestions on the way of life of husband and wife, which can be conveyed through a spokesperson.

In the Sabu community, the Puru ceremony is characterized by its unique discussions, which are carried out mainly in the Sabu language. However, Indonesian is also used to clarify important points for children who may not understand the indigenous language, ensuring they understand the essence of the discussions and agreements made during the family gathering. This inclusive dialogue allows children to voice their perspectives, such as objections to moving their mothers on the grounds that her parenting role is not over.

In the end, the conversation leads to an agreement that the mother, or widow, will live with her children. However, it was stipulated that in the event of any form of violence, his family could intervene to facilitate his safe return without resistance. During this discussion, the seating arrangements were deliberate, with both families facing each other. This setting fosters an environment conducive to sharing advice, asking questions, and offering advice, all of which aim to strengthen the bonds of love and unity between the families involved.

The bonds that are established between the families during the late husband's lifetime must endure even after he dies, continuing until the widow's own death. This lasting relationship within the Sabu tribe is rooted in a mutual agreement that respects tradition. At the heart of the discussions held in the puru tradition is a commitment to ensure that the children and families of the late husband continue to love, care for and support the widow, refraining from arbitrary actions. This is an obligation that must be upheld by the male family and children.

During these conversations, it is important for children to show their commitment to respect their mother and respect her family. Once both parties reach a consensus, the biological children, accompanied by male relatives, are expected to stand and kiss the widow's family members as a sign of readiness to abide by the customary agreement. After the discussion ended, traditional Sabu foods, such as betel nut and areca nut, were distributed to those present.

Once the customs are fulfilled, the rights and responsibilities of the widow return to the original clan. At this time, the male family could no longer interfere in the affairs of the widow, as they were no longer in the same clan. Despite this, women are still expected to nurture and raise children from previous marriages. Regarding inheritance, all rights belong to the widow, which will be passed on to her children after the widow's death. On the other hand, matters relating to children, especially those relating to customary obligations, fall under the scope of the deceased husband's male family, given that they share the same surname.

This framework reflects the Sabu people's adherence to the patrilineal system, where lineage is traced through the father. Upholding these customs does not break the relationship between the two families; rather, it reinforces the bonds and responsibilities that exist in this cultural context.

Culture and Traditions of the Sabu Tribe

The idea of an ideal society is one that embraces androgyny, in which individuals regardless of gender—actively value and embody values traditionally associated with femininity—such as empathy, compassion, and a willingness to share as passionately as they uphold values typically associated with masculinity such as assertiveness, structure, belonging, and status.

Adat puru is not just a discussion about the relocation of clan ties from women to their origins; These customs also serve as a powerful means of preserving women's dignity, ensuring they are not subjected to arbitrary treatment by their children or male relatives. It highlights a protection framework aimed at protecting women from discrimination and violence. In essence, the customary dialogue fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation for mothers and widows, by stipulating that children and men must meet the needs of women and treat them with the same dignity as given to them while their husbands were alive.

In Sabu society, a husband does not have a higher position than his wife, which shows that women are not considered inferior. This can be seen from the shared responsibility in the household, where the wife plays an important role in managing the family's finances, while both spouses make decisions collaboratively. These dynamics reflect the spirit of mutual support, which underlines the equality of women and men as partners.

Furthermore, the women's bond with their clan did not hinder their agency. Their paternal families and ancestral clans exemplify a harmonious blend of feminine and masculine values, emphasizing the importance of responsibility in supporting and protecting women from arbitrary actions. Maria Bhahi, a leading cultural-radical feminist, asserts that women should have autonomy to determine who they want, free from society's rigid labels of masculinity and femininity. He argues that the discovery of true identity can occur in a matriarchal environment, not a patriarchal environment.

An important aspect of this discussion includes reproduction, which has historically created a male dependence on females. Maria Bhahi argues that women should not give up their innate reproductive power for technological advances that serve the interests of men. By taking control of natural reproduction, women can experience the joys and challenges of childbirth, making the process more human and fulfilling.

In this context, Sabu women, after undergoing traditional practices, retain full rights to their bodies and lives. They are empowered to make choices about their future, including deciding whether or not to remarry, embracing the role of single parenthood, and fully participating in the domestic and public spheres. Furthermore, they have a legitimate claim to the inheritance and can be actively involved in their late husband's clan without any constraints that would limit their autonomy.

The choice of the Sabu women to remain single parents highlights that they do not need to be seen solely as victims of discrimination and injustice. When Sabu women are recognized as worthy individuals with access to protection and support, they can fulfill their role as mothers, nurturing their children with values based on femininity, not tied to patriarchal expectations.

Conclusion

The Cultural Concept and Tradition of Puru of the Sabu Tribe", it can be concluded that Puru customs go far beyond just a ritual of returning the status of a widow to her clan of origin. This tradition is a complex social and spiritual institution and serves as a key pillar in upholding the

dignity, equality, and protection of women in the Sabu society. In the broader context of Indonesian culture, where patriarchal structures often place women in secondary and vulnerable positions, Puru customs present as a progressive and enlightening cultural anomaly. Its main function is as a dialogical mechanism that strengthens family bonds, ensuring that the relationship of love and mutual support is maintained even after being separated by death.

From the perspective of feminist theology, the Puru custom manifests the principles of justice and liberation that are at the core of Christian teachings. This tradition effectively serves as a bulwark of protection for women, protecting them from potential violence, discrimination, and arbitrary treatment from the late husband's family. More than that, Puru also plays a role in preventing infidelity according to custom, maintaining the sanctity of previous marriage bonds. This practice is not just a ceremony, but a manifestation of noble values that consciously elevate and maintain women's self-esteem. This custom uniquely demonstrates how qualities traditionally considered feminine—such as tenderness, empathy, and compassion—can blend harmoniously with masculine traits such as assertiveness, responsibility, and a sense of belonging, to create a just and equal social order.

Women's empowerment is one of the most significant results of the Puru tradition. After the traditional procession is over, a Sabu woman regains full autonomy over her body, reproductive rights, and way of life. He is free to make choices about his future, including whether to remarry or remain a single parent, without being relegated to a subordinate position. The granting of full inheritance rights to widows to be passed on to their children further emphasizes the position of women as sovereign individuals.

The significance of feminist theology in this context becomes crucial. This theology provides a conceptual framework for women to articulate their experiences of faith and affirm God's special concern for those who are marginalized and treated unjustly. God is understood as a liberating, loving, and just being—a divine truth that is clearly reflected in the ethical and moral standards embedded in the Puru tradition. This tradition is a tangible testament to God's transformative love, emphasizing the importance of harmonious family relationships in which mutual support, protection, and strengthening are the foundation of a just and peaceful life. This approach inherently rejects all forms of violence and discrimination that disrupt the balance of life, in harmony with Jesus' mission of solidarity with the oppressed who fight for love, liberation, and justice.

In the end, the Puru tradition offers a rich and inspiring contextual theological model. For the Sabu people who embraced Christianity, this tradition provided a cultural lens to realize the values of equality of the Gospel, where men and women stand on an equal footing as complementary partners. Furthermore, the local wisdom embodied in Puru customs can inspire broader movements within society, including church communities, to more earnestly advocate for gender justice and equality—an issue that remains urgent and relevant in various cultural contexts today.

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