

Pathology of the Poverty Circle: A Study of Phenomenology and Live Experience of the “Inong Balee” (Widow) Community in Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study is aimed at discovering the circle of poverty among the “Inong Balee” (widow) community in Aceh, Indonesia based on the phenomenological approach. This study discovered that the phenomenon of the major poverty circle among the “Inong Balee” was mainly caused by their misunderstanding on the concept of *tawakkul*, that is, the idea that Almighty God will provide for everyone. The misunderstanding on the concept of *tawakkul* has resulted in their lives to surrender everything to Almighty God's provision and have done no serious and continuous efforts to avoid poverty. In addition, the minor circle trapping the “Inong Balee” in poverty was due to their lacking capital, low educational access, weak motivation, inability to manage resources, low income, forced to sell private assets, low consumption, low savings, lacking access to government institutions, and lacking business capital assistance. These findings implied that in order to overcome the poverty problem among the “Inong Balee” in the province of Aceh, Indonesia, apart from educating the poor “Inong Balee” on the proper understanding of the concept of *tawakkul*, providing easy access to education, and finance institutions would strengthen their motivation to work harder and skills in managing their assets. These would, in turn, enhance their income, consumption and saving levels.

Keywords: Poverty Circle; Poor Widow; “Inong Balee”; Phenomenological study; Aceh; Indonesia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a major and urgent problem, which has been worth talking about (Soedjatmoko 1995). The problem of poverty is a matter of human life, its existence has become human nature, but the man himself determines in which position he is, the emergence of pathology. In this study, pathology is a science of community disease, including poverty that is often caused by cultural and structural factors (Idris, 2007). Poverty is not simply a matter of state, but it also a religious concern. A prominent contemporary Islamic scholar, Yusuf Qaradawi in his ‘*Musykilah al-Faqr wa Kaifa ‘Alajaha al-Islāmy*’ describes some basic attitudes that caused poverty, namely: the attitudes of freeing themselves from fakeness and poverty; the attitudes of resignation *Jabbariyah* (accept it as it comes); and the attitudes of *Qaruniyah* (greediness).

The urgency of poverty eradication in Indonesia basically has been stipulated in the Act of Article 34, Verses 1-3 of 1945. Article 1 stated that the fake, poor and abandoned children were taken care by the State. Article 2 stated that the State develops a social security system for all people and empowers the weak and incapable of humanity in accordance with human dignity. Finally, Article 3 stated that the State is responsible for the provision of health service facilities and appropriate public service facilities and facilities. In addition, other efforts made by the government in ensuring the welfare of the government to the community are to provide special autonomy to areas that have high poverty levels. One of the areas in which the special autonomy is granted is the Province of Aceh, Indonesia as stipulated in the Law No. 18 of 2001. The birth of special autonomy in Aceh was rooted in the long conflict between the Free Aceh Movement and the central government of Indonesia. The Free Aceh Movement struggle for self-independence is currently referred to as Aceh Province. This struggle is to fight for the Acehnese natural characteristics as evidenced in the long history of the people of Aceh that was resilience and possessed high fighting power that arises from the view of life, social and community character with a strong Islamic culture. This is evidenced by the history buzz where the former President of the Republic of Indonesia Abdurrahman Wahid who declared Islamic law to be implemented in the province of Aceh on December 19, 2000 (Hadi, 2010). Although it has been overshadowed by the special autonomy and strong Islamic views, the poverty level in Aceh Province has been still very high. The Central Bureau of Statistics, Indonesia (2016) reported that there was still some areas in the province have been facing the problem of high poverty, especially in the region with abundant natural resources.

Table I. Top Ten Provinces with the highest poverty rate in Indonesia

No.	Province	Number of Poor People	Percentage
1.	Papua	898,210	28.40
2.	West Papua	225,540	25.73
3.	East Nusa Tenggara	1,160,530	22.58
4.	Maluku	327,770	19.36
5.	Gorontalo	206,520	18.16
6.	Bengkulu	322,830	17.16
7.	Aceh	859,410	17.11

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Indonesia (2016).

As observed in Table I, as one of the 34 provinces in Indonesia, Aceh currently ranked the seventh position as the province with the largest number of poor people in Indonesia, following Bengkulu Province. The low level of education has affected the severe poverty level in the province (Majid, 2014). Additionally, the poverty in Aceh was caused by several important variables such as education, unemployment and low regional income (Busra, 2010). Rejekiningsih (2011) found that, in the city of Semarang, there have been some characteristics of the poor, namely: heads of households mostly low educated with only possessed elementary school certificates, unskilled labours, having dependents of more than three people, and existing inequality distribution of financial aid for the poor. Francis (2006), in his study entitled "Poverty: Causes, Responses, and Consequences in Rural South Africa" also found that the poverty in South Africa was mainly caused by the low access to capital and low level of education. In summary, both cultural and structural factors cause the poverty level among the societies (Idris, 2007).

Unlike other provinces in Indonesia, Aceh has involved in a long conflict with the central government from 1976 to 2005. This 29-year conflict has left a bitter record in the life history of Acehese people, especially Acehese women. This conflict has damaged the socio-economic dimensions of society in the province, both males, and females. Commonly, the conflict in the province also involved the widow women, which call in Aceh as the "*Inong Balee*" to fight for their dignity through the independence. As the results of the conflict, the number of people living under poverty line in Aceh has increased, where its poverty rate has been above the national rate of the poverty level. Based on the above research background, this study is specifically aimed at discovering the causes of poverty and its poverty circle among the widow community in Aceh, Indonesia based on the phenomenological approach. The finding of this study is hoped to shed some lights for the policy makers as a policy recommendation to combat poverty among the widow in Aceh, Indonesia.

II. *INONG BALEE* (WIDOW) IN THE ACEH'S CONFLICT

The long political conflict in the province of Aceh from 1976 to 2005 has left the bitter record in the history of Acehese people, especially among the Acehese women. The ceasefire that occurred after the 29-year conflict with the central government of Indonesia was rooted in the discontent of the people of Aceh towards the central government. The members of Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) or labeled as the Free Aceh Movement blamed the central government for their discrimination against the structure of central government officials. This, in the end, has caused them for a rebellion (Susan, 2010).

During the conflict, many criminal cases have occurred especially experienced by Acehese women. The majority of the cases was sexual violence (61 cases or 59%), consisting of 31 rape cases, 11 cases of sexual torture, seven cases of cruel and inhuman treatment of sexual nuance, four cases of sexual assault, and 8 cases of sexual exploitation. While 42 non-sexual cases existed during the conflict consisted of torture (32 cases), cruel and inhuman treatment (nine cases), and ill-treatment (one case). Of the 128 perpetrators of violence, 76 of them were the state apparatuses, in particular in the form of torture and cruel and inhuman treatment and punishment of women accused of treason of "*Inong Balee*" members, wives of the GAM or having family members of the GAM. Three cases of inhuman punishment were committed by the GAM against the wives and girlfriends of the national army. 18 victims were children, with the youngest victim of 7-year old who was repeatedly raped by his neighbour. The majority of the victims were married, but for cases of sexual violence 32 of 61 cases were experienced by unmarried victims (National Commission for Women- Komnas Perempuan, 2007). The armed rebellion in Aceh was not only done by men, but also involved women called "*Inong Balee*". The "*Inong Balee*" combined from two words "*Inong*", which mean "Women" and "*Balee*", which means "Widow". Historically, the beginning of the birth of the term "*Inong Balee*" is during the struggle of Admiral Keumalahayati. The background of the emergence of troops "*Inong Balee*" was due to her passion and love of the sea of Aceh, hatred of the Portuguese that caused the death of her husband in the tragedy of the Haru war. Due to these reasons, she formed the "*Inong Balee*" forces precisely during the reign of Aceh Darussalam under the ruling of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah Al-Mukammil (1589-1604). During the period, "*Inong Balee*" consisted the widows who had been left dead by their husbands who died in the war while defending the territory of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam (Abdurrahman et al., 2004).

The re-emergence of the conflict in Aceh has again positioned the Acehnese women in the bitterness of life, abandoned by their husbands, forced to take care of their own children and manage their own economy as well as witnessed of their siblings were killed in front of their eyes. Moving from that history, the GAM again re-named the term “Inong Balee” as the GAM female combat troop during the conflict (Halimah, 2008). Statistically, the existence of former members of “Inong Balee” was not recorded neatly. Abdullah Syafei, the well-known commander of the GAM who was shot by the national army during the conflict, claimed that the number of “Inong Balee” in Aceh was about 2,000 people, similar to the claimed by the GAM spokesperson Sofyan Daud (Musfirah, 2015). August 2005 became an important year in the Aceh's history. After a devastated tsunami of 26 December 2004, the peace agreement between the GAM and government of the Republic of Indonesia in Helsinki, Finland was signed. This peace agreement becomes a new transformation for the people of Aceh to prosperity (Aizid, 2003).

III. THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

Many factors contribute to the poverty. It allegedly caused by the economic, political and social aspects, which are also important because of the individual itself. However, structural causes also have a major impact on the poverty (Varghese, 2016). The problem of poverty is a question of very low wage inequality received by some of the poor (Rebecca, et al., 2015). Additionally, disaster and lack of resources were also the causes of poverty (Beninla et al., 2015). In his study, Sounders (2013) documented that low income is one of the main reasons people are trapped in poverty. The lack of income makes people unable to strengthen their family economy. Furthermore, the loss of opportunity to earn a great reward has caused communities to live in poverty (Hertel and Reimer, 2012). The issue of poverty in China was also described by Dewen et al. (2013) who claimed that the relocation has raised the risk of poverty. Relocation is one of the government's policies to be designed well in the country. According to Ramos et al. (2016), a household headed by a woman would be vulnerable to falling into a chronic cycle of poverty. In addition, the educational level was also one of the other important factors that lead to an increase in the probability of a society falls into chronic poverty. In his study, Charles (2007) found that female-headed households tended to be poorer than male-headed households. Besides, the level of education also exacerbates the condition of households so that the lack of knowledge makes them unable to access better jobs. Tegegne and Egziabher (2010) revealed the dimensions of poverty that occurred in the region of Ethiopia, caused by low levels of income society. Besides, the lack of caloric food intake and the level of education also continued to worsen the condition of poverty in the region. Poverty in Ethiopia could also be attributed to a lack of productive resources, lack of access to capital, lack of skills and lack of employment, as well as population explosions in rural areas. The rate of urbanization also led to the proliferation of poverty. Meier and Baldwin (1960) introduced a spiral pattern of the poverty trap. The trap circle of poverty arises from the interplay between the state and societies who are still lagging behind and live in a traditional fashion with natural resources is still undeveloped. To develop its natural resources, a society must have a workforce that has the skills to lead and implement a wide range of economic activities. Additionally, a country is poor and remains poor due to its human and natural resources remain unutilized. Societies in less developed countries are mostly technologically backward. They are illiterate, lack initiative and entrepreneurial ability. The absence of skilled and trained labour leads to under-utilization and even misutilization of natural resources. Thus, a country is poor because it is caught up in under-development trap (Meier and Baldwin, 1960: 320). In developing countries, natural resources have not been fully explored and utilized due to a low level of education. The trap circle of the poverty of Meier and Baldwin (1960) could be illustrated in the following figure.

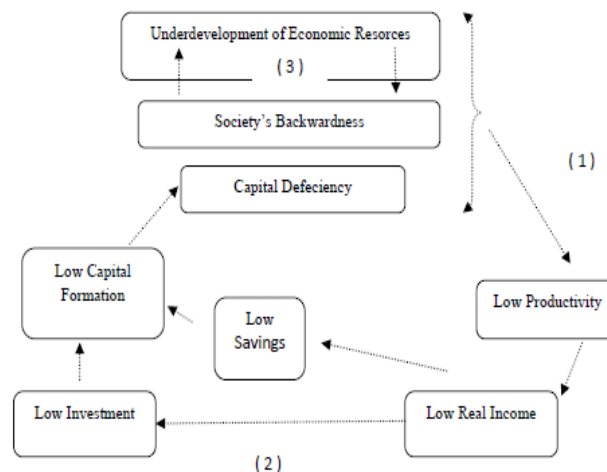


Figure I. Poverty Circle of the Meier and Baldwin (1960)

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is based on the qualitative method using phenomenological approach. Four members of the “*Inong Balee*” (widow) association located in Langsa city area, Aceh, Indonesia were selected as the main informants of the study. Informants were selected based on the technique of purposive sampling. Selection of Langsa city as a research area was due to the consistency of political leadership of *Partai Aceh*, a local political party made up the former combatants of the GAM, including “*Inong Balee*”. The details of main informants of the study are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Informant Details

Informant	Nick Name	Place of Origin	Current Domicile	Status in the Widow Association
1	SR	Sigli	Langsa	Treasurer
2	SB	Langsa	Langsa	Member
3	RL	East Aceh	Langsa	Member
4	SS	Langsa	Langsa	Chairman

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discussed the poverty of “*Inong Balee*” from three phenomenological aspects, namely: economic, structural and cultural point of view.

5.1. Understanding the Phenomenological Economic Aspect of “*Inong Balee*”

The result of the theme synthesis related to the economic aspect of “*Inong Balee*”, could be summarised, as follows:

- i. Income earned by the “*Inong Balee*” is highly dependent on their working efforts. The majority of informants did not have reliable skills except by relying on their unskilled labour.
- ii. “*Inong Balee*” are forced to work due to their need to support their children in lieu of household heads. They have the beliefs that responsibility to fight for the life of his children is their responsibility after the demise of their husband.
- iii. Another important point highlighted in this study is the courage of “*Inong Balee*” to sell the valuable assets they have. It can be interpreted that these actions reflect an attitude of courage at the greatest risk and their willingness to lose their shelter for the survival purposes.
- iv. The act of consuming cheap goods and services by “*Inong Balee*” was due to their low-income level, high food prices made them really selective in consuming foods and services. This is as said by SS, where she expressed that the consumption that he did was limited to “soy sauce is nice”. In her words:

“...to me, every day, if have no more foods to eat, it is enough to have only soy sauce with rice, and that is so great to me, praise Almighty God, compared to others who even have no rice to eat...”

The above-illustrated condition could be interpreted that, the consumption patterns of the “*Inong Balee*” refers to their ability and purchasing power. The condition of “*Inong Balee*” affirmed by Arya et al. (2015), who said that the poor families have no ability to meet the food of protein sources. “*Inong Balee*” could not do much with the conditions of very minimal household facilities. This condition was a reality experienced by them, who only possessed property for their life only in terms of a very simple land and house. The phenomenon illustrates the weak economic conditions of the “*Inong Balee*” that have made them unable to live productively. As Rosyidi (2006) pointed out that the productive activity would not be possible if there were no resources that might be used in the production process. Economic ability would certainly lead to the ability of individuals to consume sufficiently goods and services (Lipsey and 1985).

5.2. Understanding the Phenomenological Structural Aspect of “*Inong Balee*”

The first synthesis explained that “*Inong Balee*” have hopes of a productive funding fund for them to manage as venture capital. The informant “SR” confirmed that he had received the business capital assistance of Rp40 million, only that the money was managed as a group of 100 people. The money should be used as capital to buy production goods such as sewing machines, food grinder, etc. In her journey, according to SR, all the production assets could not be functioned, because there was no further fund provided to process the tool as a means of production. According to Sukirno (2013), although in a very primitive economy, the capital goods are needed in the production process.

The second synthesis of the “*Inong Balee*” poverty was due to the lack of cost in education and the conflict period, all informants, i.e., SR, SB, RL and SS only completed or not even finished the elementary school. According to Widiastuti (2010), structural poverty, especially inequality of education was also caused by information. The third synthesis is from the hospital service aspect, the informants felt that the hospital service given by the government was good, it is felt from the experience of informants who found no difficulty in

accessing the hospital, only for chronic diseases such as the tumour, and they still need the additional cost to buy medicine. This is as perceived by SR, who said that:

"...as for hospital services it is okay, but as for the severe diseases it is too burdensome for me as I have to buy medicine by my own..."

The last synthesis was related to the experience of the informants as a whole who confirmed that the conflicts of the past have had a major impact on their future survival, believing that without conflict, their lives could be better. This was felt by all informants, for example, the informant SB said that:

".....conflict, of course, put me in the worse condition, make me losses, supposedly I with my husband can live more happily, but now I have to do everything on my own..."

The above illustration was in line with the statement by Habermas (1996), that the structuralism has weakened the position of one's subjects. The individual is only limited as an agent that depends on the structure (Giddens, 2003). Structural position contributed to poverty, as of now, the poverty is now longer regarded as an individual or relative's problem, but it enlarged as a matter of state, even the world level (Agusta, 2014). The neglect of structural poverty would have a negative impact on the entire society. The cases of poverty that occur continuously among society would lead to anarchist actions and even terrorism (Djelantik, 2010). This statement was also reinforced by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), where the economic variables played a very strong role in generating civil wars. Satyanath and Sergenti (2004), the results of their study in the African region, supported the earlier findings. They explained that declining economic conditions could increase horizontal conflict or conflict among civil society. Therefore, the state also has autonomy and interests, in particular, the public interest on social welfare and poverty (Hardoko et al., 2008). This is supported by Fitzpatrick (2001) who stated that some causes of poverty were caused by the government policy failures and structural obstacles (i.e., the presence of forces outside of him that prevent the poor from moving and turning into the non-poor.

5.3. Understanding the Phenomenological Cultural Aspect of "Inong Balee"

In this study, culture could be interpreted as "the thing concerned with the mind and the intellect" (Soekanto, 1970). To the informants, poverty is a matter to be thankful, and the failure of understanding of the "tawakkul" in Islamic teachings caused them into poverty. This is as said by the Informant "RL":

"...if the condition is like this, it is better for us to be thankful the Almighty God, being in this poor condition we have to praise God, although it is difficult to face, so what else we can do, just simply accept it..."

Some of the above illustration reinforced the Sumarjono et al. (2005)'s statement that the culture has contributed to poverty cases in a region with a form of ignorance, laziness, backwardness, and fatalism. Additionally, the slow economic development caused by cultural factors, thus cultural elements is a challenge that hampers the change of people's mentality. Overall, the above illustration of the poverty circle among the "Inong Balee" in the province of Aceh, Indonesia could be portrayed in Figure 2.

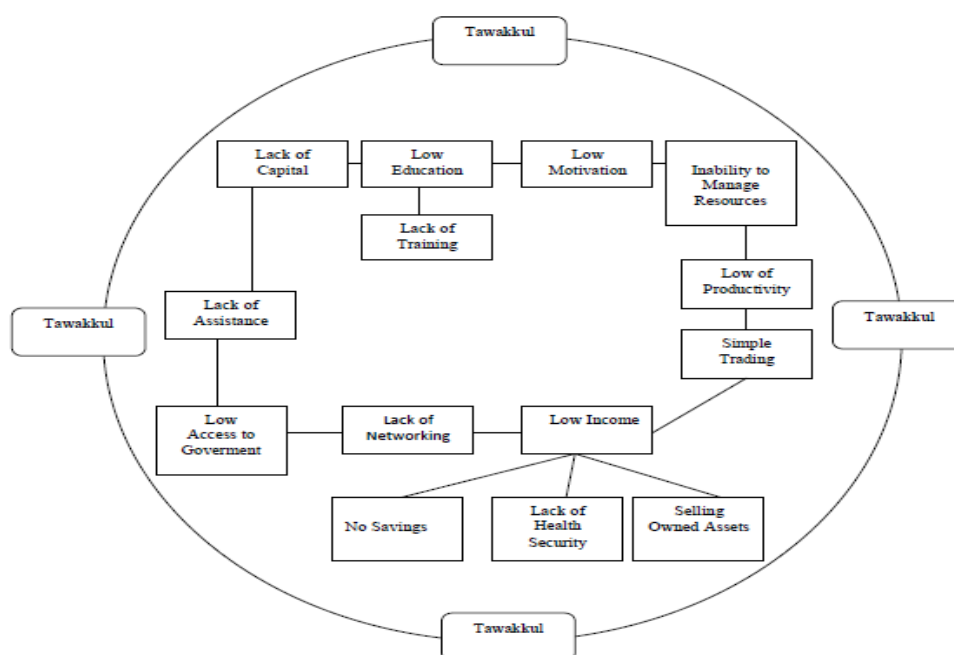


Figure 2. Poverty Circle of the "Inong Balee"

VI. CONCLUSION

This study is aimed at discovering the circle of poverty among the “*Inong Balee*” (widow) community in Aceh, Indonesia based on the phenomenological approach. This study discovered that the phenomenon of the major poverty circle among the widows was mainly caused by their misunderstanding on the concept of *tawakkul*, that is, the idea that Almighty God will provide for everyone. The misunderstanding on the concept of *tawakkul* have resulted in their lives to surrender everything to Almighty God’s provision and have done no serious and continuous efforts to avoid poverty.

In addition, the study documented that the minor circle trapping the “*Inong Balee*” in poverty was due to their lacking capital, low educational access, weak motivation, inability to manage resources, low income, forced to sell private assets, low consumption, low savings, lacking of access to government institutions, and lacking of business capital assistance.

The findings of the study provide a policy recommendation that in order to overcome the poverty problem among the “*Inong Balee*” in the province of Aceh, Indonesia, apart from educating them to have proper understanding of the concept of *tawakkul*, providing easy access to education, and financial institutions would strengthen their motivation to work harder and improve skills in managing their assets. These would, in turn, enhance their income, consumption and saving levels. These, in the end, would lift up them from the poverty.

Further study on the issue of poverty should cover broader geographical areas in Indonesia, highlight more issues, and include more respondents. The effects of the poverty eradicating program should also be evaluated, particularly on their effectiveness in combating poverty among the poor in the country.

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