

Wie is SRI?

SRI betekent meer dan alleen de afkorting van onze stichtingsnaam Stichting Ruggensteuntje Indonesië. Dat ontdekten we gaandeweg. We wisten al dat op Bali en Java meisjes en vrouwen deze naam dragen: de vrouw van één van onze contactpersonen heet ook Sri.

We werden daarna uitgebreid geïnformeerd over de oorsprong van deze naam door mevrouw Retno Handayani, aan wie wij vertelden over de stichting. Zij vertelde dat de naam staat voor de godin Sri, de godin van de rijst, de moeder van het leven. Een uitgebreider achtergrondverhaal hierover heeft mevrouw Handayani geschreven en met haar toestemming laten we dat hieronder volgen.

Coming from the land of the goddess, Javanese women acknowledge one of the goddess which is Devi Sri. For Java and Bali Society Dewi Sri is the goddess of rice. She has the power of the underworld and the moon. She is the mother of life because she symbolizes rice (the primary food of Indonesia). She is a symbol of life – giving power.

In the cultivation process of rice, its growth from seed to ripe earns is not considered a purely vegetative process, but one which may be compared with the process of human growth. The life of the rice is entirely dependent upon spiritual powers which called gods, the spirits of the ancestors, or the sun and the moon. In all this the rice – mother represent the whole field, and is looked upon as a concentration pool of the semangat (the life – force and nourishing value). She is called mother because she who keeps the rice from the whole field together during the terrible period (terrible for rice which is seen as a person) when the rice is cut, pounded, cooked etc. She is also called as a mother because of her authority over the grain of rice which are stolen by the birds or lost through other harmful causes, and which she can bring back. If the forces which are present in her are not destroyed by rough handling, then the power will also remain in the other grains, so that it will be life – giving food. The rice – mother is a feminine power, inherent in the soil. She on the one hand has the right to possess it, and on the other hand also gives it life, induces it to bring forth fruit: she preserves and multiplies this chthonic force. Without personifying or allegorizing this process, we can yet see in the life of the rice the activity of a force with feminine characteristics. The women are in magico – mystical communion with this force, as is apparent from their share in the activities on the sawahs: it is exclusively to their motherly care that belong to the planting out of the seedling (bibit), the weeding and the and the picking of earns one by one. Just as at each initiation into a new phase of life, a mentor is needed to guide the initiate and to perform the necessary task, so the women act as mentor for the rice at the critical moment of its existence. Based on the feminine power behind the cultivation of rice, Javanese views rice not from economic point of view. Rice is the divine food which never create aversion. Rice possess the qualities and mysterious power. Rice is food the gods, indeed! This is why, we eat rice three times a day.

Alongside to the understanding of Dewi Sri as the rice – mother, we also find the partnership between woman and man in cultivating the rice. Their share consists in the preparing of the fellow land, the ploughing, harrowing and sowing, and finally in carrying the bundles in the barn. This division of labour between men and women is not a rational division according to heavy and light types of work to be performed respectively by the stronger and the weaker sex. It is rather the concept of the cohabitation and procreation, which determines the parts which men and women are to play in the cultivation of the rice. This seemingly practical division of labour really has mythical background, namely that of the heiros gamos, the marriage between heaven and earth. In working the sowing, specially through ploughing and sowing, man enter into a mystic communion with supernatural power, which will fertilize mother earth. More than that the belief to Dewi Sri helps Javanese community respect the rice cultivation cycle by doing various of ritual both before plating until harvesting. Through the various of the ritual the society invited to respect and to participate in protecting the harmonious of the nature. In all of the ritual, women have the important role. Women have a role in determining time (jw. juru pethung) when the time to sow the seed and to plant will begin. She also leads of the ritual in the harvest time (jw. wiwit).

In the social level, Dewi Sri as a rice - mother becomes incarnate in the rice, by dying and being buried in the earth. Then she meet Vishnu, who has been reborn in the water, and the marriage take place, with the result that the rice thrives. This is the beginning of the life – cycle which lead to the ripening, after which the grain of rice finally falls into the earth and dies.