***Desa Kolok* and its Deaf people**

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The village

Desa Kolok (literally means Deaf village) is a small village located in North Bali, Indonesia. With regard to deafness, this village is remarkably exceptional compared to other villages in the area and, in fact, across the whole island of Bali. While all villages in the surrounding area have between two to nine deaf people, this village has 44 deaf people out of a population of 2,200. This is a rate of 2% and it is extraordinarily high compared to other pockets of deafness across the world (see Kakumasu, 1968; Groce, 1985; Washabaugh, 1986; Okyere and Addo, 1994; Johnson, 1994). Moreover, the existence of Deaf people in this village has occurred over several generations resulting in the whole population of the village being well adapted to the situation. The Deaf people here belong to, not only certain families, but the whole population of the village because all ten clan-groups that make up the village community have been found to have Deaf people. Geographical and social isolation combined with intermarriage patterns involving members of close families appear to be the most responsible factors for the high level of deafness incidence in this village. According to a scientific study, the high incidence of deafness in *Desa Kolok* is caused by the spread of a non-syndromic congenital recessive deafness gene called 'DFNB3' (Liang et al., 1998). Due to the spread of this deafness gene, the village has always had Deaf for many generations.

The Deaf population in the village

Graph 1: The rate of deafness in Desa Kolok with regard to different social groupings

Source: Marsaja, 2008 p. 61

The present 44 Deaf in the village includes 21 males and 23 females aged between 1.5 to 83 years. These Deaf people are widely spread in the village community, including all ten clans residing in the village. Looking back into a previous record, the average percentage of *kolok* in *Desa Kolok* had once reached as high as 2.15% in 1995. The number of Deaf in this village at the time was 47 out of a population of only 2,185 (Friedman, et al., 1995, p. 86). Compared to the present figure, the Deaf population in the village had only dropped slightly from 2.15% to 2% in over 19 years. There are a number of well-grounded reasons why the rate of deafness in this village is always high. Firstly, deafness that spread in the village is caused by a recessive

deafness gene called *DFNB3* specifically belonging to the village and this gene has also found to affect people from a neighbouring village of Bila. Liang et al. (1998) claim the *DFNB3* deafness gene found in *Desa Kolok* makes a significant contribution to hereditary deafness in the world. The present 44 Deaf together with their 85 close hearing family members are highly potential of transmitting the gene to an indefinite number of children and grandchildren in an indefinite number of generations to come.

Secondly, all of the *kolok* people in *Desa Kolok* who are over twenty years old are married. Marriage breakups among them are frequent but they normally remarry again. The 23 *kolok* families identified in the village comprise 13 (56.52%) Deaf couples, 2 (8.70 %) Deaf-hearing couples, and 8 (34.78 %) hearing couples with Deaf children. This suggests that marriages between Deaf are very common, making deafness even more easily inherited to the coming generations. The number of hearing-hearing couples giving birth to Deaf children was also surprisingly high. This is likely to be resulted from the fact that either one or both of these hearing couples are related to the members of the hereditary *kolok* families who possibly still carry the *DFNB3* recessive deafness gene with them.

The roles of the Deaf people in the community

The *kolok* in their *adat* (traditional community) roles

Similar to all the village communities across Bali, *Desa Kolok* is a community with two different systems: *desa adat* (traditional community) and *desa dinas* (modern community). The *desa adat* is concerned with the management and maintenance of temples and religious activities, while *desa dinas* is concerned with modern civil community activities such as education, laws and regulations, trades, etc. The Deaf men generally attend meetings that are held regularly by both the *desa adat* and *desa dinas*. The main language used in meetings is Balinese and a hearing person who sits next to a Deaf person normally interprets the meeting for him voluntarily using *Kata Kolok*, the village sign language. The Deaf people participate actively in all areas of community activities. During a temple ritual, they make offerings and go for a prayer as ordinary hearing people do. Although they are not able to read any printed calendar, they can generally predict with precision when a temple festival will occur in the village. One privilege that is given to the Deaf people is they are exempt from any money levies, probably due to the fact Deaf families are among the poorest in this village.

In various activities, especially which require hard labouring such as a digging grave for somebody's burial, catching, carrying and butchering animals for a family feast and celebration, carrying the dead to the burial, carrying a *wadah*¹ to the cemetery, etc., the most prominent role of all is the digging a grave in the cemetery for the dead. Grave digging in this village is exclusively the duty of the *kolok*. This practice is not common in other villages across Bali, where digging a grave is normally done by members of close family of the dead. It is not clear when and how this practice started in the village. As far as the village's oral tradition is concerned, it was due to the bravery of the *kolok* to confront and tackle the evils of the cemetery of which the majority of the hearing are generally scared. Many hearing people in the village believe that the *kolok* are close friends of both the evils and the angels of the cemetery. They also believe the *kolok* have the ability to communicate with those supernatural creatures using their sign language.

1. *Wadah* is a tall pyramidal wooden structure full of ornamental decorations in which the dead person is placed when cremated. The *wadah* is carried in a ceremonial procession from the home of the dead to the cemetery where it is finally burnt together with the dead.

When somebody dies in the village and he or she is going to be buried, a member of his or her close family would contact one of the senior *kolok* to prepare the grave for the dead in the cemetery. The *kolok* would then contact their crew and go to see the family of the dead. They would normally have a cup of coffee with the family members while discussing when the burial will be conducted. In the early morning of the day of burial, the *kolok* would also need to come once again to the family of the dead, have a cup of coffee, and then collect the necessary tools and offerings for the digging. Upon finishing their duty to dig a grave in the cemetery, they generally return to the family of the dead to have some lunch. After lunch or sometimes in late afternoon, the *kolok* would also join in the procession to the burial together with other hearing members of the community.

As a reward for conducting this particular *adat* duty, each of the *kolok* involved generally receives ten thousand *rupiah* (approximately US\$1.00) from the family concerned. This amount of money is worth approximately one day of labouring jobs in or around the village. Besides this, the *kolok* can also collect some pieces of *pis bolong* (ancient Chinese coins) from their digging which they can sell for another ten thousand *rupiah* (US\$1.00) per *satak* (two hundred pieces). Every dead body buried in the cemetery has to carry quite a few *pis bolong* in his or her grave. The wealthier the man or woman who died, the more *pis bolong* he or she is likely to carry in his or her grave. As quite a few *pis bolong* may be collected in just a single digging, the majority of the *kolok* consider the grave digging as a very rewarding *adat* duty.

Another explanation of why the *kolok* do this particular *adat* duty in the village came from the *dinas* authority. The *kepala desa* (head of the official village) of the village stated that the *kolok* were freed from any public *adat* levies and they had to do the grave digging duty as compensation. While this explanation sounds pretty logical, it does not seem to gain support from the *adat* authority. The *kelian adat* (*adat* chairman) argued that there was no proof in the *adat* records for the link between the digging duty and exemption of levies for the *kolok* families. There was virtually no evidence as to whether the two phenomena occurred at the same time in such a compensatory nature or they each occurred at a different period with a different motivation.

In other areas of private *adat* involving family-based cultural events such as *tigabulanan* (three month) and *otonan* (six month) celebrations for a baby; *mesangih* (tooth filing); *ngaben* (cremation); wedding etc., the *kolok* participate actively like the hearing. As such family celebrations also tend to involve *mebat* (chopping and cooking), *mecarar* (distribution and packaging of food), *mejejahitan* (making ornaments) and *metanding* (arranging offerings) as the case in an *odalan* (temple festivals), the *kolok* are generally involved in this activity together with other hearing members of the family. However, their involvement in these private *adat* activities seems to be slightly different from those in public *adat* activities. The involvement of *kolok* here seems to be more prominent and active. In any family-based *adat* celebration, the *kolok* generally start with a job to catch the animals for the celebration (i.e. pigs and/or chickens) and carry them to the location of the celebration. This job is normally conducted the day before the celebration and the *kolok* who are involved would be given a generous amount of money in return. On the day of the celebration, the *kolok* generally help the family to butcher the animals and make them ready for the *mebat*. The women *kolok* help other women *mejejahitan* (to prepare offerings), *nyakan* (to cook rice) and *mekedas-kedas* (to clean up in and around the family compound). After the *mebat* and *mejejahitan* activities have been completed, the people who participate including the *kolok* are all given a big feast.

During a *ngaben* (cremation ceremony) which is in most cases also considered a family-based cultural celebration (i.e. private *adat*), involvement of the *kolok* is basically similar to that in other private *adat* practices such as *tigabulanan* or *otonan*. One type of involvement of the

kolok in a *ngaben* which seems to be particularly vital and always receives appreciation from most hearing families is carrying the *wadah* in the procession to the cemetery. As the *wadah* is generally tall and huge, it normally requires a lot of people with strong muscles like the *kolok* to carry it along in the procession to the cemetery. The *kolok* who are involved in this tiring task normally receive some money from the family involved as a reward. Such a practice is not common for the hearing people who do the same. In fact, it may be considered as a serious offence to them if they are offered some.

The kolok in their dinas (modern community) roles

Within the *dinas* stream, the *kolok* function almost in the same way as the hearing members of the community. The Deaf men attend official meetings and participate in various *dinas* activities. In some *dinas* organisations and activities, the roles of the *kolok* are even more predominant than the hearing. These include the *hansip* (civil defence force), the village's clean water system, the cattle breeding programme and the *tempe-tahu* (soybean) food production.

The members of the *hansip* (civil defence) of the village are dominated by the male *kolok*. The *kolok* are well honoured by the villagers for their bravery and commitment as guardians of the village. The existence of the *kolok* community in the village is often associated with the security of the whole village. Many of the villagers stated thieves and burglars who often operated in the surrounding villages were too scared to enter the village due to the vigilance of the *kolok*. One male *kolok* used to be hired for a long period of time by a rich family from another village to operate and guard their coffee drying and processing business. The bravery of *kolok* in their *dinas* roles here seems to be closely related to their bravery in their *adat* roles particularly with regard to their special duty of digging graves in the cemetery which ordinary villagers may find too scary to perform.

Besides *hansip* (civil defence), the *kolok* also play a prominent role in the supply of clean (drinking) water for the whole village. The village's drinking water is taken from a natural spring located miles away from the village. It is carried along and distributed to houses using medium-sized and small plastic pipelines. The *kolok* are assigned by the *kepala desa* (head of the village) to maintain the pipelines and guard them from being damaged or stolen by people from neighbouring villages. This *dinas* duty attracts various rates of labouring wages for the *kolok* involved depending on the types of jobs and the amount of time spent for the jobs.

Another prominent role of *kolok* in *dinas* affairs seems to be related to a cattle-breeding programme. The programme was sponsored by the state government but was fully run by the *desa dinas* in the village. The basic aim of the programme was to help the poor in the community. As *kolok* families belonged to those of the poorest in the village, the majority of them deserved to join and be included in the programme. Each of those families received either one young cow or a goat to breed in their own farm. The first offspring of the cattle has to be returned to the village to be distributed further to another family who deserves it, and then the cattle became theirs.

Similar to the cattle-breeding program was the *tempe-tahu* (soybean food) production programme. The programme was also sponsored by the State Government through the Department of Social Welfare but was fully managed by the *desa dinas*. It was intended to help the poor in the village with some instant job opportunities. The facilities and the first capital for running the food production programme were fully supplied by the sponsor. The capitals for the following rounds of production had to be taken from the previous sale of the product. At one stage, this programme had successfully employed a lot of *kolok* as well as a number of interested hearing people in the village, but was unfortunately discontinued due to a poor quality of financial management.

The *kolok* and their unique Deaf cultures

Apart from active participation in the mainstream cultures, the *kolok* also develop and maintain specific Deaf activities. The *kolok* have established a strong Deaf alliance in the village. This alliance is known and signed as KOLOK MEKEJANG 'Deaf together', but among the hearing people, it is called *perkumpulan kolok* (Deaf Alliance). The alliance is an informal group that has no real structure, but some *kolok* do appear to have a joint leading role for the alliance. The alliance appears to function as a forum for unification and solidarity among the *kolok* and their families. It is also a forum through which all Deaf can work and help one another in their everyday life. In sociocultural terms, the alliance may also function as a specific *adat* institution for the *kolok* that prescribes the rights and responsibilities of the *kolok* within the alliance.

Perkumpulan kolok is more visible from its activities rather than from its internal structure. The alliance regularly performs and conducts social and cultural activities such as *suka-duka kolok* (happy and sad gatherings among *kolok* families), *kolok* feast, *janger kolok* (*kolok* dance) and the *pencak-silat kolok* (*kolok* martial arts). At the same time, the alliance also hosts gatherings that involve a high level of signing expertise such as telling stories and experiences, sharing new information and job opportunities, and talking about trades and businesses that specifically concern or affect the life of the Deaf people in the village. If a *kolok* family conducts a *suka* (happy) celebration, all the *kolok* from other families are expected to come through the alliance to share the happiness in the family. The same obligation applies when a Deaf family is at time of *duka* (sadness, mourns) due to a death of a family member. Absence from any occasion that involves Deaf families has to be clarified immediately so as not to disturb the harmony within the *kolok* alliance. In such an occasion all the Deaf will gather with the celebrating family members and help prepare for the celebration. As all the hearing people from the celebrating family are involved, social interactions occur, not only between the Deaf, but also between the Deaf and the hearing people. This is how assimilation between the Deaf and the hearing people develops and is maintained especially across Deaf families in the village. These patterns of *suka-duka* activities are very different from those that are conducted within the mainstream culture of the village. If a celebration concerns a hearing family, people from non-related families are not normally expected to come, unless they get invited. In this case, only close or extended family members are expected to come without invitation.

Apart from *suka-duka* activities, the *kolok* and their family members also gather regularly in a special *kolok* feast. This is another social activity through which the *kolok* and the hearing people in the village improve and maintain their relationship with one another. At certain times of the year (generally after rice harvesting period), the *kolok* take a day off from work and come together for a big feast. The feast is generally conducted in an open area such as a garden, rice-field, or playground. It is not common for a feast that concerns no specific family to be run in a family compound. This is probably for neutrality purposes. At this stage, it is not clear how frequent and why the *kolok* regularly organise a big feast. From what people do during the feast, it appears it is mostly a socialising and eating event. The activity normally begins at lunchtime starting with preparation of food and drinks, then followed by either a banquet type of feast or ration type of feast, depending on how much food is available and how many people are involved. As the activity involves many *kolok* people, a lot of signing is used during the feast. This social activity does not only involve *kolok* people, but also many hearing members of their families. Other hearing people from non-Deaf families such as employers of the *kolok*, staff from the office of the head of the village, workmates of the *kolok* also get invited. The hearing people who come to the feast are normally fluent signers who can understand and communicate freely with the *kolok*.

One important thing to note from this feast is *kolok* generally prefer to have a dog for the feast. It is not clear why they prefer dog-meat to other meat for the feast. The hearing people involved generally say that a dog is far cheaper compared to other meats so that the *kolok* can have enough food to eat. However, from a number of feasts the researcher attended in the village, no *kolok* have ever talked about or complained about the cost of the feast. The *kolok* always say dog-meat is good and it gives them a lot of energy. Besides this preference, there is also a story, in the past, the *kolok* used to have a cat instead of a dog for the feast. Some people believe the *kolok* in the village gained deafness from eating too much cat-meat.

Another prominent activity of the *kolok* in this village is *kolok* dance that is more popularly known as *janger kolok*. The dance takes the form of a Balinese traditional performance called *janger*. *Janger* is a performance that involves a loud *gamelan* (traditional orchestra) and a young female dancer with beautiful and colourful dress and headdress. The dancer has a fan on one of her hands. The dancer is following the rhythm of the loud music and invites male dancers (one at a time) from the audience to dance together on the stage. One dancer normally picks up four to five male dancers to be invited to the stage before she finishes her performance. As the case with the *janger kolok*, the *gamelan* is performed orally by the male *kolok* using whatever noise they can produce from their mouth. The tune of this oral music is in fact very close to the normal music that is used by the hearing. It takes a lot of practice involving a hearing dance teacher to establish a *janger kolok*. The dance teacher said that he had to use different types of movement patterns to control and manage the tune of the *kolok* oral music. Besides this fluent interpreters are also to be involved if the teacher cannot sign well.

Janger kolok is not only a cultural activity for the people in *Desa Kolok*. A number of professional performances have been conducted in towns and cities around Bali. The local government sometimes invites the *janger kolok* to perform in an important event such as Independence Day and Anniversary Day. Arcana (2003), a journalist from *Kompas*, notes that *janger kolok* is alive and well in *Desa Kolok* and often performs in a number of international hotels in Denpasar.

During the performance of *janger kolok*, the *kolok* also generally present *pencak-silat kolok* (*kolok* martial arts). This is actually another entertainment activity that can be presented on its own without *janger kolok*. Similar to *janger kolok*, martial arts are also very popular among the hearing population in this village. The *kolok*, especially the males, are particularly interested in this activity because they take a *dinas* role as members of the *hansip* in the village. Martial arts are considered to be an essential training element if a person wants to become a member of *hansip* in the village.

The dancing and martial arts are in fact recent introductions into the village and have been promoted by hearing people with a more Western, welfare orientation towards the *kolok*. As was indicated with regard to the earlier study of *Desa Kolok*, Western notions of 'disability' and 'normality' are beginning to be felt in the village as the *kolok* come under the influence of government welfare programs (Branson, Miller & Marsaja, 1996).

The maintenance of the *kolok* cultures in the village such as *suka-duka kolok*, *kolok* feast, *janger kolok*, *kolok* martial arts, etc. implies the maintenance of *Kata kolok*. *Kolok* gatherings seem to become the most favourable settings in which *Kata Kolok* is used extensively. As interaction with the Deaf becomes intense in any such gathering, so does the use of *Kata Kolok*. The use of *Kata Kolok* signing during any *kolok* gatherings here can be considered as another sub-culture that relates more towards the life of the Deaf people rather than to the hearing people.

The amount of signing used during a *kolok* gathering appears to be very high equalling that found across *kolok* families. In terms of speed and fluency, signing during a Deaf cultural activity is also as fast and fluent as signing within the Deaf families. The people, Deaf and

hearing, generally scatter into several groups and each talk about different topics or stories. Topics are changing very rapidly within any group and all people want to bring up their topic to the group. It appears the hearing people involved here all have identified themselves as Deaf in a social sense because they tend to show up with their signing expertise and try not to be involved in talk with other hearing people.

Kata Kolok here serves, not only a communicative function, but also a solidarity function. The people who get involved in any Deaf activity conducted through the *perkumpula kolok* use *Kata Kolok* as a means of socialising with one another, telling stories and experiences, sharing new information, talking about job opportunities, wages, trades and businesses that specifically concern the life of the Deaf and their families.

Concluding remarks

In sociocultural terms, the Deaf people in this village are an integral part of the whole village community rather than belonging to a particular section of the community (see Marsaja, 2003; 2008). All of the Deaf are related in one way or another with the hearing people in the community. On a clan-group basis, the Deaf people here belong to all of the ten clan-groups that make up the whole village's community. They are accepted in their families as well as in the community, and are awarded full rights and responsibilities in the village. They participate fully and actively in all spheres and at all levels of the community's life. The presence of hereditary Deaf people in this village has really made the villagers adapt themselves to the condition by developing sociocultural systems that are accommodative to the life of both the Deaf and the hearing in the community.

The factors that motivate the integration between the *kolok* and the hearing population in this village seems to be similar to those which were found in the nineteenth century Martha's Vineyard Island in Massachusetts (USA) and the Yucatec Mayan Village in Mexico. The assimilation of the *kolok* into the hearing community here is characterised by three main features as described by Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan (1996):

- multigenerational Deaf people through which culture and language are transmitted,
- geographic and social isolation which motivate endogamous marriages making Deafness even more recessive in the community, and
- the use of a sign language by both the Deaf and hearing people around.

In addition to these general factors, the village was also found to have a number of specific social and cultural systems, organisations, alliances and social networking systems through which the Deaf can develop and maintain their strong assimilation with the mainstream hearing population (Branson, Millers and Marsaja, 1996; 1999; Marsaja, 2003; 2008). Apart from assimilating through the mainstream sociocultures, the *kolok* people in this village have also been assimilating through the development and maintenance of special Deaf activities and ways of interacting that live within the wider mainstream hearing cultures. The roles of the Deaf sub-cultures here are not only a means of assimilation but also appear to become a social identity for the *kolok* in the village. The specific Deaf activities identified include *kolok* alliance, *kolok* feast, *janger kolok* and *kolok* martial arts. The way *Kata Kolok* is used within *kolok* families and during any *kolok* social gatherings or cultural performances is also culturally distinct. This is because the uses of the sign language for these domains appear to be significantly different in terms of fluency and the use of special jargon compared to the normal uses of it in everyday communication with the hearing people around (see Marsaja, 2008; de Vos, 2012). These specific sociocultural factors have never been identified from earlier studies on assimilative Deaf communities.

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