

Kadazandusun and Harvest (Kaamatan) Festival

Kadazandusun is the original inhabitant and the largest race group in Sabah. A word called Kaamatan, it is said, derived from the word that means harvest in Kadazandusun. In May every year Kaamatan festival is held all over Sabah. The festival gradually expands in scale. It is held first in family level then in village level and then in district level. Finally the festival reaches its climax on 30 and 31 in May and the whole state celebrates it. These days are state holidays.

Kaamatan festival has been the annual cultural event of Kadazandusun since time immemorial and it follows the traditional religion of Bobolian. People express their deepest gratitude to God who saved the human from famine and starvation with full of love and mercy. Most Japanese know the similar ceremony called NIINAMESAI has been held in Japan since ancient days. In the ceremony Japanese express their thanks for the harvest of rice. Not long ago most people in Sabah were farmers growing rice and they had to work severely to reclaim rain forests especially in inland area. Poor harvest easily led to starvation. So they are in great awe of grains. Their lives are connected intricately with the lifecycle of paddy cultivation and Kaamatan is positioned at the last stage of the lifecycle. Kaamatan is the ceremony and festival to thank for the harvest of rice and to pray for next more prolific crop. In addition to expressing a feeling of gratitude to God's generosity for bringing abundant harvest, Kaamatan is useful for strengthening the union of the community through feast, traditional music and dance.

In order to understand Kaamatan you have to go back to the mythical world. In the beginning, there were nothing but only God Kinoingan and His wife, Suminundu. They created together the universe, the heaven and the earth, and everything seen and unseen, known and unknown and finally human beings. The world was pure and beautiful. But Kinoingan's son, Ponompulan rebelled against His father and destroyed human heart and spirit; thus human beings began doing vice. Kinoingan banished His son to the hell angrily and caused people seven disasters. The seventh one was a terrible famine that almost erased all living things from the earth.

People recognized their sins and begged Kinoingan for permission. Kinoingan's only one daughter Huminodun threw herself on His mercy and implored Him to forgive people for their sins. She accepted His idea to sacrifice herself for saving human beings. It is said that her body was divided into several parts and each of them was planted as a different kind of seed and became resources of our foods. Her flesh became paddy, her blood red rice and her mind soul of rice called Bambaazon. Kaamatan is the festival to thank for the Creator, Kinoingan and His daughter, Huminodun who provided system to support lives on the earth

with mind of great love and deep mercy.

Psychic professional called Bobohizan celebrates the important ritual Magavau. Bambaazon exists in rice and its processed food. For the period of paddy cultivation Bambaazon is hurt and torn into pieces by beasts and birds, floods and human behaviors. Bobohizan travels in the spiritual world, collects the pieces of Bambaazon that are broken up and wandering around, unites them, pulls it back to barn, soothes it through feasts and asks it for next generous harvest. Magavau, it is said, means that people recover their lost things in Kadazandusun.

The highlight of Kaamatan is beauty contest called Unduk Ngadau. 'Unduk' means sprout of plant and implies youthfulness and progress. 'Ngadau' means the noon sun and implies Kadazandusun ideal lady who has overall beauty of mind, heart and body. 'Unduk Ngadau' is the event to select a lady who is most alike to Huminodun and the beauty of full intelligence and modesty is selected. Representatives selected at district level Kaamatan assemble and the competition for the selection of a yearly beauty queen takes place. The hall swarms with a large attendance and runs high.

Kadazandusun attend Kaamatan festival in the ethnic black clothes stitched by golden thread. However people except Kadazandusun can also participate in it freely. Traditional song, dance, music and others are performed and folkcrafts, food, clothes and so on are sold at many booths. There exist some places where local people serve tapai (rice wine) and folk dishes. Many sport competitions are held. Various kinds of people who are different in race, skin color, religion or cultural background gather together and celebrate this event merrily. I suppose Kaamatan may work quite effectively to cultivate and maintain harmony and unity for a diversity of people in Sabah.

In May 2010 I took part in district level Kaamatan in Tambunan and Ranau and state level one at KDCA in Penampang. Mr. Pairin attended all of them and governor attended state level.

KDCA is abbreviation for Kadazandusun Cultural Association, non political body and is practicing many activities, such as investigation, documentation, conservation, development, prevalence, etc. of multi-racial Kadazandusun culture. KDCA is now led by Mr. Pairin who is the supreme leader of Kadazandusun titled Huguang Siou. Dr. Othman and his wife, Dr. Lungkiam are also in charge of important posts in KDCA. Whenever I visit Sabah, I stay at their home as homestay.

As multi-races and multi-folks live in Sabah, diverse languages are used and some religions are believed, Sabah is really a melting pot of people. Nevertheless the social situation is stable in Sabah and I have never heard any strife caused by the difference of race or religion. I guess achieving stability owes highly to the constant endeavors of the

administrators. Moreover the event beyond race and religion like Kaamatan unites the whole people, which must be useful for the stability too. The traditional religion that had been believed in Sabah before modern religion prevailed still puts down roots deeply into the minds of the people and connects them strongly. I think it must bring good effects for the stability. They still respect Bobohizan as the translator between God and human. Their ancestors believed the doctrine that everything had life. So even a stone, a tree and a river were living things.

In addition, the reason why I feel kinship with Kadazandusun might proceed from the similarities that Kadazandusun are agricultural people and eat rice as staple diet, the myth has been handed down among them since the old days are in their minds and they have inherited DNA till today that they stand in awe of nature.