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Original article

Ethnobotanical study on local cuisine of the Sasak tribe in Lombok Island, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: An ethnobotanical study on local cuisine of Sasak tribe in Lombok Island was carried out, as a kind of effort of providing written record of culinary culture in some region of Indonesia. The cuisine studied included meals, snacks, and beverages that have been consumed by Sasak people from generation to generation.

Objective: The aims of this study are to explore the local knowledge in utilising and managing plants resources in Sasak cuisine, and to analyze the perceptions and concepts related to food and eating of Sasak people.

Methods: Data were collected through direct observation, participatory-observation, interviews and literature review.

Results: In total 151 types of consumption were recorded, consisting of 69 meals, 71 snacks, and 11 beverages. These were prepared with 111 plants species belonging to 91 genera and 43 families. Fabaceae contributed the highest number of species to the cuisine. *Cocos nucifera* had the highest *Index of Cultural Significance* value and highest number of reported uses. Apparently traditional social and cultural values are still closely associated with Sasak food and eating.

Conclusion: Sasak people interpret their food not only as a material for supporting life, but also as a means to maintain a good balance between humans, environment, and spiritual needs.

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1. Introduction

Culinary culture includes all knowledge related to the production and consumption of food. The foods prepared reflect the development of peoples' knowledge of plant and animal resource management around them, including knowledge of methods for hunting, gathering, husbandry, cultivation, conservation, and utilization. Written records of culinary culture in some regions in eastern Indonesia are scarce, in any language. Ethnographic and biological studies can support the preservation and development of local knowledge of food plants and animals [1–3]. Written knowledge can never completely replace oral communication of culinary culture, but can support innovation, new forms of oral

communication, and efforts to preserve the genetic diversity of food resources [1].

Lombok is one of the two biggest islands in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, and is located between Bali and Sumbawa Island (Fig. 1). Sasak people, the original tribe of Lombok, have the physical characteristics, language, and culture of Malayo-Polynesian people, and are closely related to peoples on the nearby islands of Java, Bali, and Sumbawa [4].

Lombok Island has a total population of 3,352,988 people [5], and about 80–90% are Sasak people who are distributed in four districts and one municipality. Most Sasak people live in villages, in predominantly Sasak or in mixed communities. Some predominantly Sasak communities live in *desa tradisional* (traditional villages).

Regarding the study of the food culture of Sasak people, there is still limited ethnobotanical research. The form, function, and serving of several Sasak dishes were reported in 1986 by Wacana

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et al [6]. Previous studies also recorded the plant utilization in the Senaru village in North Lombok and detailed several typical dishes of West Nusa Tenggara with recipes and brief explanations of cultural aspects and plant diversity for food and medicine in Jeruk Manis village, East Lombok [7–9]. The present paper reports the diversity of plants used in Sasak cuisine and records the local cuisine and use of natural resources. This research is also expected to have significance for regional and national discussions of traditional cuisines, diets, and cultural heritage. Food allows us to make connections and move across geographical boundaries, and can be a medium for understanding the world [10].

2. Methodology

Field research, from September 2014 to May 2015, was conducted with a purposive sampling method [11]. Data were obtained through direct observation, participatory observation, interview, and literature review [12,13]. Semistructured and open-ended interviews were directed to 120 informants (72.5% women and 27.5% men) chosen from 42 villages in 26 subdistricts of four districts and one municipality in Lombok Island (West Lombok, East Lombok, North Lombok, Central Lombok, and Mataram city). Villages from where the information was taken are areas of 5–10 acres, with populations of 100–1,000 people. Research areas and villages where informants and information came from are shown in Fig. 1, indicated by symbols for “village” and “traditional village.” Informant selection was based on the snowball method [14], with the restriction that informants should have competence and information related to the research. The age range of informants was 20–79 years, and their occupations included local cook (*ran*), farmer, housewife, local food-seller, local leader (*kepala dusun*, *pemangku*, *pemekel*), government employee, and others.

Information was obtained on ethnobotanical aspects of traditional cuisine such as dishes prepared, ingredients, preparation method, and cooking techniques. Particular attention was given to the utilization of food in daily life, for physical needs and cultural rituals. The “traditional cuisine” described in this study includes meals, snacks, and beverages that Sasak people themselves consider to have been known, made, and consumed in their family or community for a long time. Information was recorded regardless of whether or not people still made and consumed the food described.

Index of Cultural Significance (ICS) by Turner in Hoffman & Gallaher [15] and Purwanto et al [16] was calculated to assess the cultural importance value of all plant species, with *use categories* are dishes in Sasak cuisine:

$$ICS = \sum_{i=1}^n (q \times i \times e)_{ni}$$

ICS = Index of Cultural Significance

q = quality of use

i = intensity of use

e = exclusivity of use

n = use category (1 to n)

3. Results

3.1. Food categories in Sasak cuisine

Sasak people distinguish their cuisine into three main categories: *daharan* (meal, main dishes, and their complements), *jaje* (snack), and *ineman* (beverage; Fig. 2).

Most *daharan* dishes are served as daily food; some are served in rituals and ceremonies. In the case of famine caused by disaster, drought, and crop failure, people may eat emergency food. These

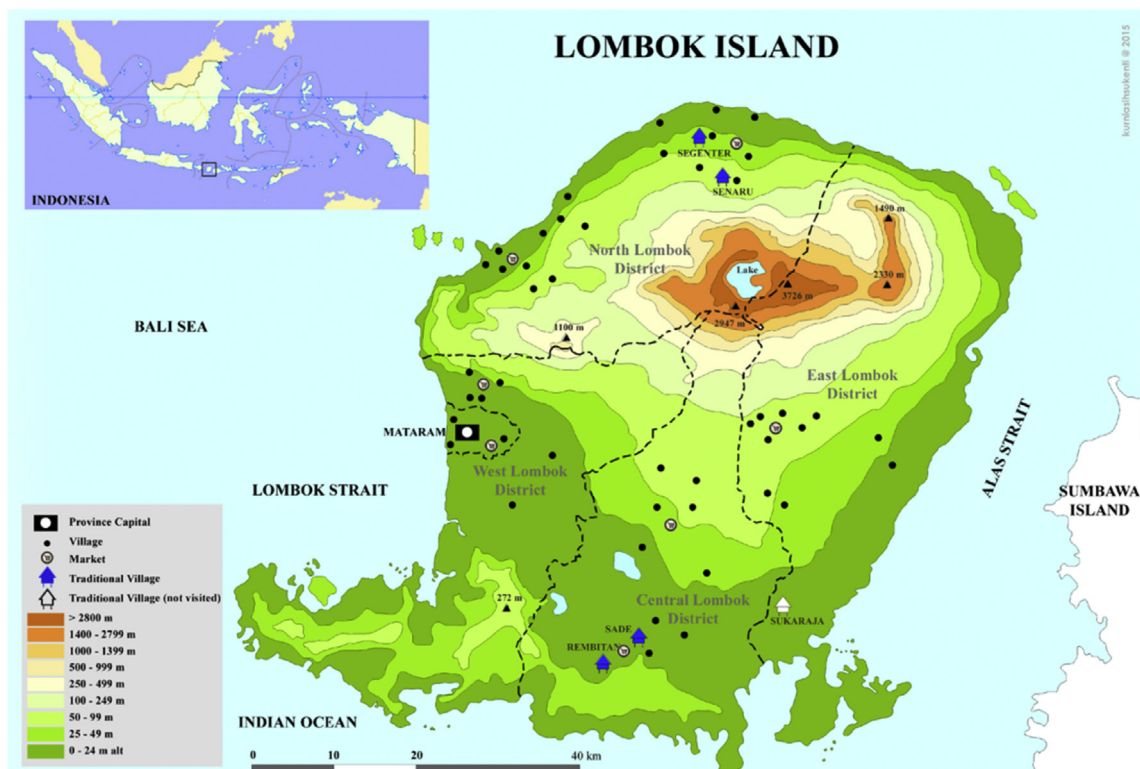


Fig. 1. Map of Lombok Island. Research areas and villages where informants and information came from are indicated by symbols for “village” and “traditional village.”

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