

**DEADLY DANCES IN THE BORNEOAN RAINFOREST:
HUNTING KNOWLEDGE OF THE PENAN BENALUI BY
RAJINDRA K. PURI. 2005. 408 PAGES**

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Below is the review of the book entitled 'Deadly Dances in the Borneoan Rainforest: Hunting knowledge of the Penan Benalui' written by Rajindra K. Puri (2005). This monograph reports on the research undertaken between 1991 and 1993 to document the nature of hunting for the Penan Benalui of Lurah River Valley in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. A 26-month survey of hunting practices, incorporating ethnographic and ethnobiological research methods focused on the Penan category *kan* 'mammals' provided data for an analysis of hunting knowledge. Active participant-observation – learning to hunt and followed by reflection of that experience – provided insights into the knowledge required to be a successful day in and day out hunter. This particularly tacit knowledge appears to accumulate without deliberate intention or much effort.

This book was chosen because of its interesting discussion on the hunting activities of Penan Benalui that continue to be an important activity for many of the world's remaining small-scale societies despite the dramatic social, economic and environmental changes in the last century. This book has explored the emotional power of the whole process of hunting (and, by extension, fishing and gathering) and why it is used as a metaphor for most of human behaviours, even in societies where very few still engage in it. Overall, this book has six (6) chapters of discussion.

In the first chapter, it has grasped the issue of anthropological approaches to hunting, knowledge and culture. This chapter discusses on the concepts and meaning of Penan Benalui, theoretical framework, research questions and its organizations. Hunting is defined as an important domain for anthropological inquiry since the dawning of the discipline in the twentieth century and continues to be a widespread and important economic and cultural activity. In today's world, the remaining small-scale societies still rely upon hunting to obtain food, materials and items of trade. The Penan Benalui communities live in mountainous interior of East-Kalimantan, Indonesia (Central Borneo).

The second chapter argues on the Lurah River valley and its inhabitants. This research has been conducted at the Lurah River in Pujungan District (Kecamatan), Bulungan Regency (Kabupaten), Province (Propinsi) of East Kalimantan. The valley covers over 200, 00 ha from elevations of 250metres above sea level and at its mouth to the mountain peaks above 1,500 metres to the north and south. In 1993, this area had a population of 275 Kenyah badeng and Penan Benalui in four villages. The Penan are traditional nomadic hunter-gatherers that have only recently begun to settle down and, in some cases, adopt agricultural practices, while the Kenyah traditionally live in longhouse and are swidden agriculturalists and accomplished fishers.

The main discussion addressed in chapter three is the environmental context of hunting. It argues on the Penan ethnoecology, the weather patterns, geology and geomorphological resources, vegetation and animal diversity. The hunting knowledge of the Penan Benalui of Long Peliran comprises their knowledge of the forests, mountains and rivers to locate animal prey, plants and other resources. These communities also believe that weather is an important factor to decide where, when and how to hunt. They believe that hunting in the rain is much easier as animals will seek shelter and rest as the rain washes away the scents of humans and the sound of rain conceals a hunter's movements. Interestingly, most Penan avoids

hunting in the rain for fear of triggering a relapse of malaria or being injured by falling, water-soaked tree branches.

The social-economic context of hunting was documented in the fourth chapter. It explains further on the collection of wild foods and materials, sago production, agriculture, collection of non-timber forest product and trade besides scheduling of economic activities. The following chapter reveals the techniques of hunting on its past and presents besides social and ecological characteristics of animal capture techniques. Besides discussing the several hunting techniques in details, it also disclosed the success rate of the techniques itself.

Finally, in the last chapter, it expresses the hunting knowledge and performance of the Penan Benalui communities.

In a nutshell, the reviewer would highly recommend this book to most cultural anthropology and Southeast Asian researchers and also to those who are interested in learning more about the lives of the Penan Benalui. The discussions, arguments, data and illustrations in this book were exceptionally written due to the integration of some previous studies and researches in order to strengthen the arguments and discussion. This book is a stimulating read for those who are interested in social and cultural anthropology, development studies and Southeast Asian studies. It has fruitfully fulfils the overall concerns on cultural anthropology of Penan Benalui of the Borneon Rainforest.