

## Sakai Community: Tracking The Identity Of The Forgotten Ancient Malay Tribe From Riau Province, Indonesia

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### Abstract

Sakai's identity has recently begun to be recognized as a customary law community in Riau Province, however this recognition is still partial from a communal identity perspective. This research will specifically describe the search for Sakai as a collective identity among people who have a genealogical relationship with ancient people who previously lived on the coast of the Mandau River. Identity tracing is used as an administrative consideration for policy makers in Riau Province, Bengkalis Regency and other districts/cities related to Sakai's existence, as well as a means to decipher the "missing link" in discussions regarding Sakai's existence which should be connected directly in the related historical series.

**Keyword :** Sakai, identity, history, Riau, Sumatra

### INTRODUCTION

The existence of customary law community units based on traditional backgrounds with customary territories from which their ancestors originate is one of the social systems of Indonesian society which is recognized constitutionally in the Undang-Undang Dasar Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945 (UUD 45). In the constitution of UUD 45, it is stated that customary law communities can be recognized if they fulfill the requirements of "*hak-hak tradisionalnya sepanjang masih hidup dan sesuai dengan perkembangan masyarakat dan prinsip Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*" (their traditional rights as long as they are still alive and in accordance with the development of society and the principles of the Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia)", which in reality actually creates new problems. This problem specifically concerns the identification of the existence of customary law communities, because since independence in 1945 until now there have been many changes in the social system along with the development and dynamics of the government system as well as the impact of population migration and economic growth in areas that previously had customs, traditions, and regions with their respective social institutions.

The development and dynamics of the government system in the Republic of Indonesia means that the social systems of local communities must be adapted to the government administration system regulated by law. These adjustments often cause previously existing social institutions to change or disappear to comply with the provisions of existing laws and regulations.

In Bengkalis district, for example, the social institutions that existed in the past started from the existence of communities with each region being different from one another. Bengkalis Regency was previously part of the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom and in this region in the past there were autonomous forms of local government with each having its own cultural independence. In the Bab-alkewa'id Book (the code of laws of the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom published in 1898), in the current Bengkalis Regency area, there used to be 9 tribal states that were subject to the Bukit Batu State Province and 2 Sakai tribal states that were subject to the Siak Sri Indrapura State Province.

The 9 states in the Bukit Batu province consist of the Hamba Raja Dalam tribal state, the Sembilan Suku tribal state, the Hamba Raja Dalam Kenaikan tribal state, the Tjedun tribal state, the Senggoro tribal state, the Akit Selat Murung tribal state, the Melayu-melayu Selat Murung tribal state, and the land of Bulang. Meanwhile, in the province of Siak Sri Indrapura there is the land of the Batin Lima Sakai tribe and the land of the Batin Eight Sakai tribe. The Kingdom of Siak does not regulate or control the local government system and local customs or culture as long as the population in the area recognizes and submits to the sovereignty of the kingdom.

The existence of a community unit called the Sakai, both the Batin Lima Sakai tribe and the Batin Delapan Sakai tribe, has begun to have its identity and rights eroded due to rapid national development which tends to exploit local resources without paying attention to local interests. Economic growth and social changes in society as a result of this growth are factors that trigger the disappearance of the identity of local indigenous communities. When an area, which was previously a residential or customary area of the local community, becomes a center of economic activity, there is a tendency for the local community's customary rights to be marginalized due to the significance of the majority of these economic interests, both in the context of regional interests and national interests.

In the perspective of the existence of the Sakai indigenous community in Bengkalis Regency, the identity and existence of traditional institutions, traditions and areas of the indigenous community are largely unknown to the general public and government circles, most of whom have immigrant backgrounds. Migration from various areas around Bengkalis Regency since 1957, which was triggered by the presence of the Caltex oil field in Duri District and the Caltex oil port in Dumai City, is one of the factors causing the erosion of the existence of local traditional communities. However, the existence of traditional communities and their social institutions in the past can still be traced as a collective memory among community groups that still have genealogical relationships with local residents and authorities who were previously domiciled in Bengkalis Regency, especially in the area that was previously called Batin Lima Sakai tribal states and Batin Delapan Sakai tribal states.

In the context of recognizing the Sakai as a customary law community, the Riau Provincial Government has done this through a Decree of the Governor of Riau with content containing the Recognition of the Imbo Ayo Traditional Forest and the Sakai Bathin Sebangga Tribal Traditional Law Community in 2022.<sup>1</sup> This recognition is a positive step by the provincial government in accommodating the existence of the community known as Sakai in Riau Province. However, if viewed based on the existence of the Sakai community as a whole, this recognition actually creates the impression of a new definition from the perspective of the existence of Sakai-based society and culture.

The Sakai recognition from the Riau Provincial Government in 2022 only mentions the Bathin Sebangga Sakai tribe as a customary law community, so that it can create a wrong impression regarding the Bathin Sebangga Sakai tribe as an ethnic group with its own culture and different from other communities which are also known as Sakai. Batin Sebangga itself, according to the Bab-alkewa'id Book, is one of the *hinduk* or village that is part of the Batin Delapan Sakai tribal state. In this case, Batin Sebangga is one of the Batin of eight Batin who were previously subordinate to Batin Meradjo Lela, chief of the Batin Delapan Sakai tribe.

Sakai is the collective identity of the people who were once part of the Batin Selapan Sakai and Batin Lima Sakai tribal lands located on the coast of the Mandau River, a tributary of the Siak River. For this reason, this study specifically outlines the definitive concepts of Sakai identity which can be used to complete the state's administrative feasibility of sakai identity as a Traditional Law Community in Riau Province without causing division or distortion of the identity of the various communities previously known as Sakai. Apart from that, this identity study also functions as a means to decipher the "missing link" in discussions regarding the

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<sup>1</sup> Mediacyenter Riau. "Keinginan Masyarakat Adat Suku Sakai".

existence of indigenous communities from local communities which should be directly connected in the series of local, national and international history.

This study focuses on discussing the concept of identity which is relevant to the historical background of the existence of the term “sakai” for ancient communities on the coast of the Mandau River. It is hoped that the concept of identity that has been explored and proposed in this study can be a solution in clarifying the legality of the existence of ancient communities on the coast of the Mandau River and their descendants today. Even though it brings up the concept of “Customary Law Communities”, this study does not discuss the legal aspects of Customary Law Communities but rather describes the existence of the identity of community groups definitively based on the perspective of their interests in legalizing them with an identity that can be differentiated from other Customary Law Communities.

## METHOD

This research will specifically discuss the identity of customary law communities from the community unit known as “Sakai” in Riau Province based on interpretive analysis of various historiographic heuristic references from various referential data before the era of Indonesian independence. References before Indonesia's independence are used as primary material for analysis because since Indonesia's independence there has been a distortion in collective memory among the Sakai community. This distortion was triggered by the transition of identity from Sakai when they were non-Muslims to Malay after converting to Islam.

Further information after Indonesia's independence is used as secondary material to complement the lack of data from sources before Indonesia's independence. However, this further information needs to be filtered based on heuristic correlation of facts from the first variety of records regarding Sakai's whereabouts. The heuristic facts of the first variety of records come from records before the 20th century which are records of the collective memory of the Sakai community at that time.

The process of interpretive analysis of various historiographic heuristic references before Indonesia's independence was carried out by (1) collecting heuristic evidence from various collective memories recorded by writers in the past; then (2) analyze the word-for-word correlation in collective memory with various local historical facts; and then (3) tracing the interpretive premises of the information contained in the collective memory. The premise is based on the perspective of interpretation, correlation, comparison, and/or contrapretation of the meaning of recorded words as historical clues (or in this case we call it the *historiolexis* method) to find clues and facts that can be analyzed conclusively with the factual situation of collective memory in historiography. This method was developed by Freddy Hasiholan Sidauruk as a solution to finding historical traces based on collective memory records as historical clues from communities that do not have written records in their internal culture.

The main parameters in *historiolexis* analysis are lexical concepts containing heuristic data, especially the oldest records from the collective memory of the community that is the object of research as well as other communities that are related or live side by side with the object under study. The oldest records are traced from various ancient records or other forms of written records based on filtering the suitability of collective memory with historical facts that existed at that time, so that it can be distinguished which data is a distortion due to perceptions of isolated conditions or lack of local knowledge with data that is suitable for use as historiographic data.

The heuristic data collected and filtered based on the construction of historiographic analysis are limited to the concepts of lexicology, phonology and etymology of various heuristic information whose origins can be ascertained, especially data from records of information from local residents at a time when it is estimated that there are still traces of collective memory from the community that is the source of the information. Heuristic data is focused on key words from past records related to the words Sakai, Mandau, and other terms connected to the concept of the origin of the existence of “Sakai” in Riau Province.

The heuristic data used is limited to information recorded during the period before the independence of the Republic of Indonesia to avoid information bias due to distortion of local memory by the transition of identity as an Indonesian nation after independence. Each piece of information that becomes heuristic data is then traced for its suitability as a fact based on the historical dynamics in the area including the areas around the research object, namely the area where the "Sakai" community used to live.

In tracing the location of origin, linguistic analysis methods are used, especially etymological analysis of terms or words used as identities, as well as the relationship of these terms with the existence of various heuristic data related to historical facts in areas that are thought to be directly or indirectly related to the object of research. In this case, toponymy is only focused on locations that are thought to be related to the history of the origin and migration of "Sakai". Toponymy analysis is only carried out if correlative proof is needed regarding the origin of the tribe with the location that is thought to be the point of correlation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Polemic Of Sakai's Identity

The existence of the Sakai Tribe in what is now called Riau Province, based on information from Rijn van Alkemade (1885) and Van Anrooij (1885), is known as the Sakai of the Mandau River.<sup>2</sup> Then Moszkowski, in his notes in 1909, stated that the term "sakai" was a big insult for them at that time and they preferred to be called "orang batin".<sup>3</sup>

Porath in his 2018 notes explained that the local population, where he lived at that time, strongly rejected the term "suku terasing" (isolated tribe) from the government. Instead the term they use for themselves, apart from Orang Kampung and Orang Sakai, is Orang Asli.<sup>4</sup>

Changes in terms of ethnic identity that occur repeatedly in the Sakai tribe are basically an indication of the significant socio-political and cultural changes that occurred in certain eras in the Sakai tribe. These changes ultimately cause a lot of distortion in the collective memory of the local community, so that in the end it is difficult to use local information as heuristic data because of the large risk of information distortion due to various causes of "confusion" triggered by distortion of collective memory. Porath (2018) sees this phenomenon as cultural amnesia, especially when it comes to the origin of the name "sakai", so that when he researched it in 2018, he found that there was false speculation among some local people who said that the name Sakai came from Japan.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Porath also stated that every Sakai is fully aware that it is an exonym and generally people do not know why they are called that or where the name comes from.<sup>6</sup> However, if the existence of the term "sakai" is connected to various historical fragments related to the Mandau area and the surrounding area, then it is possible to find clues regarding the origin of the name "sakai".

### Sakai's Identity In History

An early indication of the existence of people on the Mandau river can be found in William Marsden's notes, published in 1811, which mention the existence of an area called Mandau or Mandol.<sup>7</sup> He got the name of this location based on a Dutch map. Marsden does not explain at all the existence of the community in Mandau, but this explanation shows that the existence of the

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<sup>2</sup> Rijn van Alkemade, "Het Rijk Gassip," 220-1, 235-6; Hijmans van Anrooij, "Nota Omtrent Het Rijk van Siak," 287, 305.

<sup>3</sup> Moszkowski, "The Pagan Races of East Sumatra," 708.

<sup>4</sup> Porath, "The Orang Batin," 289.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 289.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, 355-6.



area on the Mandau River was known to Europeans even though their knowledge of the local community was still very limited.



**Picture 1.** Location of Mandau according to the Marsden Map.

*Source: Marsden, The History of Sumatra, 1811.*

The existence of the Sakai community on the Mandau River was first recorded by Rijn van Alkemade (1885) and Van Anrooij (1885). However, information regarding the history or origins of Sakai can only be found in Rijn van Alkemade's notes, while Van Anrooij is more focused on explaining local demographic and economic conditions.

The origins of Sakai in the upper reaches of the Mandau River in Rijn van Alkemade's notes are closely related to the existence of an ancient kingdom called the Gassip kingdom. In the notes of Tome Pires (1512) and the chronicles of Sulalatus Salatin in the 17th century,<sup>8</sup> this kingdom was called the Siak kingdom, a kingdom that existed long before the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom which was founded in the early 18th century.

To be able to estimate when Sakai was domiciled in the upper reaches of the Mandau River, first refer to Rijn van Alkemade's statement regarding the origins of the Gasib (Siak) population as follows:

*Omtrent den oorsprong van de bevolking van het overige Siak ver haalt de overlevering het volgende: Een viertal personen, later bekend onder de namen Datoe Merpoesoen [3], Datoe Sai, Datoe Kelantan en Datoe Merbadak, uit Priang Padang Pandjang (Priaman) afkomstig, trokken naar het tegenwoordige Siak, waar zij zich, de eerste aan de soengei Gassip, de tweede aan de soengei Sai in Senapalan (tegenwoordig Pakan Baroe), de derde aan de soengei Kelantan en de vierde aan de Soengei Merbadak met der woon nederzetten [1]. Deze vier personen worden als de stamvallers van Siak's vorspronkelijke bevolking beschouwd en hunne begraafplaatsen, die in Poelau Lawan, Pakan Baroe, Mandau en Betoeng worden aangetroffen, zijn steeds door de bevolking als heilig (kramat) in eere gehouden. Men zou hen gevoegelijk de hoofden der soekoe's Gassip, Senapalan, Mandau en Betoeng kunnen noemen, naar de streken waar zij zich vestigden.<sup>9</sup>*

About the origin of the population of the rest of Siak, tradition states the following: Four people, later known as Datoe Merpoesoen [3], Datoe Sai, Datoe Kelantan and Datoe Merbadak, came from Priang Padang Pandjang (Priaman), moved to present-day Siak, where they settled, the first at the Sungei Gassip, the second at the Sungei Sai in Senapalan (now Pakan Baroe), the third at the Sungei Kelantan and the fourth at the Sungei Merbadak with the residence [ 1]. These four people are considered the

<sup>8</sup> Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, 135, 149, 248, 262; Ahmad. *Sulalatus Salatin*, 00.

<sup>9</sup> Rijn van Alkemade, "Het Rijk Gassip," 219-20.

descendants of Siak's original population and their burial places, which are found in Poelau Lawan, Pakan Baroe, Mandau and Betoeng, have always been held in honor by the population as sacred (kramat). One could properly call them the heads of the sukkoos Gassip, Senapalan, Mandau and Betoeng, after the regions where they settled.

The main clue from the information above is regarding the existence of a position as “*Datoe*”, the origin of which states “*uit Priang Padang Pandjang (Priaman) afkomstig (came from Priang Padang Pandjang (Priaman))*”, and “*Deze vier personen worden als de stamvallers van Siak's vorspronkelijke bevolking beschouwd (These four people are considered the descendants of Siak's original population)*”.

The first clue regarding the existence of the word “*Datoe*” in Rijn van Alkemade's statement indicates that “*Datoe Merpoesoën*”, “*Datoe Sai*”, “*Datoe Kelantan*” and “*Datoe Merbadak*” have a connection with the culture that is the heritage of Kadatuan Sriwijaya. The term “*Datoe*” or “*Dātu*”<sup>10</sup> is known in all regions within the Srivijaya hegemony, including Sumatra, the Malacca Peninsula, West Kalimantan, the Sulu Islands in the Philippines and others. The use of the word “*Datoe*” or also called “*Datuk*” is a term for leaders left over from the leadership system from the Kadatuan Sriwijaya era which can also be found again in subsequent times in various government systems of the kingdoms inheriting the Sriwijaya region.

Then, the second clue regarding the information regarding their origins from “*Priang Padang Pandjang (Priaman)*”, is basically very confusing, because Pariangan (*Priang*) which is located near Padang Panjang (*Padang Pandjang*) is an area with a different location from Pariaman (*Priaman*). Rijn van Alkemade may not have realized the difference in location between Pariangan, Padang Panjang and Pariaman because he did not go there and only gathered information from people in Siak. Apart from that, it is possible that, in the collective memory of Rijn van Alkemade's informants, these three locations were indeed considered one area.

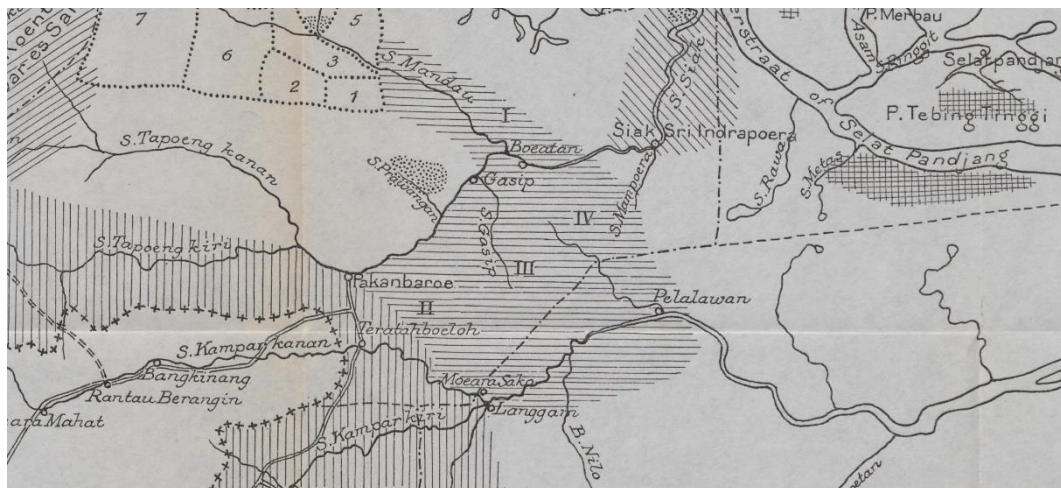
The third clue regarding “*Deze vier personen worden als de stamvallers van Siak's vorspronkelijke bevolking beschouwd (These four people are considered the descendants of Siak's original population)*”, is the basis for determining that “*Deze vier personen (These four people)*” which consists of “*Datoe Merpoesoën*”, “*Datoe Sai*”, “*Datoe Kelantan*” and “*Datoe Merbadak*” were the ancestors of the residents along the Siak River who later, if their location was adjusted to the Tideman map drawn based on Moszkowski's map, became known as “*orang talang*”.

The talang people along the Siak River consist of “*Talang Mandau*”, “*Talang Koetip*”, “*Talang Gasip*” and “*Talang Dajoen*”. *Talang Gasip* then gave birth to tribes which became known as “*Talang Sigalas*”, “*Talang Pandan*”, and “*Talang Gronggang*”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “*Dātu*” comes from Proto-Malayo-Polynesian meaning ancestor, chief, or noble. See: Bellwood, et al., *The Austronesians*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Rijn van Alkemade, “*Het Rijk Gassip*,” 221-2.



**Picture 2.** The location of Talang on the Tideman map was drawn based on the Moszkowski map. Talang areas are shown as horizontal lines with Roman numerals. (I) Talang Mandau, (II) Talang Koetip, (III) Talang Gasip, (IV) Dajoen.

Source: Tideman, "Land En Volk Van Bengkalis," 1935.

Then Rijn van Alkemade explained the existence of the ancient kingdom which he called the Gasip Kingdom as follows:

*Deze soekoe's breidden zich langzamerhand uit, vooral de soekoe Gassip, die de voornaamste schijnt te zijn geweest; de ontwikkeling dezer streken, die daarvan het gevolg was, trok de aandacht van een vorstentelg uit Priang Padang Pandjang. Yam toean Belang, gelijk de overlevering dien anak -radja noemt, begaf zich naar de soengei Gassip, waar de soekoe Gassip verblijf hield en een versterking bezat, die Kota Merangei heette. Daar hij uit dezelfde negari als de vier soekoe's af komstig was, bestond er tusschen beide een zekere band, en niet veel moeite kostte het Yam toean Belang, om weldra veel invloed en grooten aanhang te verkrijgen, waarvan het gevolg was dat de vier soekoehoof den hem tot hun vorst uitriepen. Hij werd alzoo Radja van Gassip en hield zijn verblijf in de Kota Merangei.<sup>12</sup>*

These suku gradually expanded, especially the suku Gassip, which seems to have been the most important; the resulting development of these regions attracted the attention of a royal scion from Priang Padang Pandjang. Yam toean Belang, as tradition calls him anak -rajah, went to the sungei Gassip, where the sukko Gassip resided and had a fortification called Kota Merangei. Since he came from the same negari as the four sukko, there was a certain bond between the two, and it did not take much effort for Yam toean Belang to soon acquire a lot of influence and a large following, which resulted in the four sukko becoming the head of the proclaimed him their monarch. He thus became Rajah of Gassip and resided in the Kota Merangei.

The appointment of "Yam toean Belang" as king by the four tribal chiefs as mentioned above marked the founding of a kingdom called the Gasip Kingdom on the Siak River. Furthermore, Rijn van Alkemade explained that the existence of Yam Tuan Belang is closely related to the existence of another ethnic group called the Sakai Tribe, as he explained as follows:

*Tegelijk met Yam toean Belang waren vier doebalangs, Radja Padjang, Lebé Pandjang (diens zoon), Nè [3] Dondong en Nè Katoelangan genaamd, naar Gassip gekomen. Aan beide laatstgenoemden werd met hunne volgelingen, bekend onder den*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

naam van orang sakai [1], de tegen woordige talang Gassip als woonplaats aangewezen [2]. Deze orang sakai nu hadden, om de eene of andere reden, zich de ongenade van den vorst op den hals gehaald, zoodat zij genoodzaakt waren uit te wijken en naar de andere zijde van de Siak -rivier te vluchten. De door hen aldus verlaten grond werd toen weggegeven aan de soekoe Gassip, die door den vorst gelast werd om die streek te bewonen en te bebouwen. De orang sakai vestigden zich eensdeels in boven -Mandau en Koenta (Kota -Inten), anderdeels aan de soengei Prawang. Hoewel later weder door den vorst in genade aangenomen, durfden de orang sakai niet weder uit hunne schuilplaatsen terugkeeren en trokken zij zich meer en meer terug in het binnenland, waar zij tot op den huidigen dag in hunne bosschen een zwervend leven leiden. Diegenen evenwel, die naar de soengei Prawang, een zijtak van de Siak-rivier, waren getrokken, bleven daar onder een hoofd, dat den titel van Batin Prawang verkreeg [3].<sup>13</sup>

Along with Yam Tuan Belang there are four dubalangs, named Radja Padjang, Lebé Pandjang (his son), Nè [3] Dondong and Nè Katoelangan, had come to Gassip. The last two with their followers, known as orang sakai [1], were assigned the current Talang Gassip as their place of residence [2]. Now these orang sakai had, for one reason or another, incurred the disfavor of the prince, so that they were obliged to give way and flee to the other side of the Siak River. The land thus abandoned by them was then given away to the Sukkoe Gassip, who was ordered by the monarch to inhabit and cultivate that region. The orang sakai settled partly in upper Mandau and Koenta (Kota -Inten), and partly on Sungei Prawang. Although later accepted again by the monarch, the orang sakai did not dare to return from their hiding places and retreated more and more into the interior, where they lead a wandering life in their forests to this day. However, those who had gone to the Sungei Prawang, a branch of the Siak River, remained there under a chief who acquired the title of Batin Prawang [3].

One important clue from Rijn van Alkemade's information above that must be paid attention to is the existence of the name "*Nè Dondong en Nè Katoelangan (Nè Dondong and Nè Katoelangan)*" and their followers who were then called the "*Orang Sakai*". Rijn van Alkemade explained that the term "*Nè*" is an abbreviation of the word "*Nènèk*" which can also be interpreted as grandfather.<sup>14</sup> The term "*Nènèk*" in this case is intended to refer to an ancestor (grandfather).

The use of the term "*Nènèk*" to refer to ancestors is also found in the indigenous tribes of the Malacca Peninsula, as Newbold (1839) found in the tribe known as "*Banua*".<sup>15</sup> The various indigenous tribes on the Malacca Peninsula, including the Banua mentioned by Newbold, are sometimes generally referred to by the term "*sakai*".<sup>16</sup>

The use of the term "*sakai*" to refer to ancient communities in the upper reaches of the Mandau River, when connected to other residents called "*talang*" around the Siak River, is an initial indication that proves that the term "*sakai*" is not a term that has a negative connotation. However, this term relates specifically to the historical background of the communities in the upper reaches of the Mandau River itself. For this reason, searching for the word "*sakai*" for communities in the upper reaches of the Mandau River must be focused on answering the question of why these communities do not use the term "*talang*" as their identity, as do the various communities around them.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 220-1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 220, fn. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Newbold, *Political and statistical account, Vol. II.*, 376, 394.

<sup>16</sup> Skeat dan Blagden, *Pagan Races*, vol. I, 22.



Clues to finding answers regarding the differences in identity of the people in the upper reaches of the Mandau River and the surrounding communities may be traced based on Rijn van Alkemade's statement about "*Tegeljik met Yam toean Belang waren vier doebalangs* (Along with Yam Tuan Belang there are four dubalangs)". This information shows that "*Nè Dondong*" and "*Nè Katoelangan*" and their followers who were later called "*orang sakai*" had the same origins as "*Yam toean Belang*", namely coming from Priang Padang Pandjang. This means that the location of the origins of the "*orang sakai*" is the same as the origins of the "*talang*" ancestors. However, the thing that needs to be paid attention to in Rijn van Alkemade's notes is who lived first in the Siak River area. In this case, according to Rijn van Alkemade's notes, the ancestors of the "*talang*" lived earlier in Siak than the ancestors of the "*orang sakai*".

The positions "*Nè Dondong*" and "*Nè Katoelangan*" in Rijn van Alkemade's information are referred to as "*doebalangs*" or in Malay called *ulubalang*<sup>17</sup> who function as head of troops. The information regarding "*Aan beide laatstgenoemden werd met hunne volgelingen...* (The last two with their followers..)" shows that the ancestors of the "*orang sakai*" were not only "*Nè Dondong*" and "*Nè Katoelangan*", but also included the "*volgelingen* (followers)" accompanying these two figures. This means that the term "*orang sakai*" has a meaning related to their status when "*Yam toean Belang*" founded the Gassip kingdom, namely as soldiers or knights.

If the etymology of "*sakai*" is connected to the Sanskrit word सखा (*sakhā*, noun for men) or सखि (*sakhi*, noun for women) which means friend, colleague or companion;<sup>18</sup> then it is clear that the meaning of "*sakai*" for "*orang sakai*" most likely comes from from Sanskrit and not the original language of the Malay family (Proto-Malayo-Polynesian). The etymology of "*sakai*" originating from Sanskrit has been explained by previous researchers, some of whom include Wilkinson Skeat and Bladgen (1906) who refer to the notes of Grunwedel (1893), Couillard (1983), and Porath (2018). In the Malay perspective, apart from having the meaning of identity for native people, Wilkinson (1901) also explained the meaning of Sakai as followers, retainers, dependents.<sup>19</sup>

Sanskrit is one of the main languages in Kadatuan Sriwijaya, but its use is likely to be exclusive and only applies within the central circle of power of Kadatuan Sriwijaya and is not carried out within the local government in the regions that are its mandala.<sup>20</sup> This exclusivity can be seen in the Sabokingking Inscription (Telaga Batu Inscription) which describes the terms of position in Kadatuan Sriwijaya. The terms mentioned in the inscription are dominated by Sanskrit, as can be seen in Hermann Kulke's (1993) statement as follows:

At the top of this hierarchy stood the ruler of *Śrīvijaya*. He was followed by the crown prince (*yuvarāja*), the second crown prince (*pratiyuvarāja*), and royal princes (*rājakumāra*). According to the inscription they had been invested by the ruler of *Śrīvijaya* "with the charge of a *Dātu*, you who protect all the provinces of my empire" (line 20). They are followed by princes of royal blood (*rājaputra*), local rulers (*bhūpati*), army commanders (*senāpati*), officers (*nāyaka*), secretaries (*pratyaya*), royal confidants (*hāji pratyaya*), court officers (*dandanāyaka*), "surveyor of groups of workmen" (*tuhā an vatak = vuruh*), "surveyor of low castes" (*addhyāksī nijavarna*) cutlers (*vāsīkarana*), princely officers (?) (*kumārāmātmya*), regular and irregular soldiers (*cātha-bhata*), administrators (*adhikarana*), clerks (*kāyastha*), architects (*sthāpaka*), naval captains (*puhāvam*), traders (*vaniyāga*), customs officers (?) (*pratisāra*), royal washermen (*marsī hāji*), and royal slaves (*hulun hāji*) (lines 3-5).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Wilkinson defines "*ulubalang*" as a soldier or an officer. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, 60.

<sup>18</sup> Wiktionary, "sakhā (सखा)."; Wiktionary, "sakhi (सखि)."; Windows Library, "Shakhi, Sakhi, Sakhī, Śākhi, Śākhin, Shakhin: 31 definitions."

<sup>19</sup> Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, 363.

<sup>20</sup> Sidauruk, *Jejak Waris Buluh Bohal*, 114.

<sup>21</sup> Kulke, "Kadātuan Śrīvijaya," 160-161.

Sidauruk (2022) explains that the phenomenon of term positions in the Sriwijaya Kadatuan government which is dominated by Sanskrit is probably intended to show the supernatural or sacred image of Sriwijaya Kadatuan internal officials in front of the Dātu and Batin of the Sriwijaya sakala (all) *mandalas*.<sup>22</sup> *Mandala* is a political system that is rooted, inherited and widespread in Southeast Asia since prehistoric times.<sup>23</sup> The term *mandala* comes from Sanskrit which means "circle" and is a system of power where local rulers still have independent power and government but recognize and submit to the power of other rulers who are much stronger than them.

Returning to the discussion regarding the etymology of the term "*sakai*" from the Sanskrit word सखा (*sakhā*) or सखि (*sakhi*), based on the previous discussion above, it is possible that this term is a sacred term in the Kadatuan Sriwijaya government system for friends or allies who recognize the sovereignty of Kadatuan Sriwijaya. This recognition is carried out through a sacred bond (sacred oath),<sup>24</sup> a bond that usually lasts from generation to generation. In this case, "*orang sakai*" can be interpreted as an identity for Kadatuan Sriwijaya allies, sacredly bound by generations to the rulers of Kadatuan Sriwijaya and the descendants of these rulers.

The existence of the Sanskrit word सखा (*sakhā*) or सखि (*sakhi*) as a form of sacred hereditary bond between the "*orang sakai*" and the Kadatuan Sriwijaya rulers, may be an explanation of why there was no rejection by the "*orang sakai*" of the kingdoms that had relationship as heir to Kadatuan Sriwijaya. For example, the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom uses the Sanskrit term श्री इन्द्रपुर (Sri Indrapura) to show that the kings in Siak still refer to the historical roots of their descent to the line of Srivijaya kings, because Sanskrit was one of the languages used during the Kadatuan Sriwijaya era.<sup>25</sup>

#### Sakai As A Customary Law Community

Defining the identity of indigenous peoples who previously lived in the upper Mandau River area in Bengkalis Regency is still a matter of debate among experts. The main polemic regarding this identity is the use of the term "*sakai*" which is generally known by local people who use their identity as Malay. The term "*sakai*" then became the definitive term used by the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom to differentiate the indigenous people who previously lived in the upper area of the Mandau River from other community groups in the surrounding area who had different customs.

The context of Malay identity is only used exclusively by Malay-speaking people who have converted to Islam, so that indigenous people in the upper Mandau River area who in the past also spoke Malay but had not yet converted to Islam were then called or known by the term "*orang sakai*". When the "*orang sakai*" began to embrace Islam around the end of the 19th century, their identity as "*orang sakai*" began to be rejected by most of the local population in the upper Mandau River area. This rejection was due to the many negative connotations of the word "*sakai*" used by the Malay Muslim community at that time.

The word "*sakai*" with a negative connotation is still often found today among people who live in Bengkalis Regency and Dumai City, for example in the sentence "*Sakai kali kau!*" which is a derogatory sentence which means that the person mentioned in the sentence does not keep up with the times. Another example of negative connotation can be seen in the statement of I.B.

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<sup>22</sup> Sidauruk, *Jejak Waris Buluh Bohal*, 114.

<sup>23</sup> Chutintaranond, "Mandala," 90.

<sup>24</sup> Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia*, 17; Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree*, 55. Newbold notes the existence of this oath of allegiance among the Benua which is also known by the Malays of the Malacca Peninsula as the "*Sumpah Setia Berkacha-darah*". See: Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account, Vol. II*, 395.

<sup>25</sup> See Sidauruk, *Jejak Waris Buluh Bohal*, 249-50.

Mantra (1977) that mentions Sakai as a “*suku terbelakang*” or retarded tribe as can be seen in the following statement:

*Suku bangsa yang terdesak ini, dalam daerah penelitian terdapat di pedalaman Sungai Mandau, yaitu di Minas, Muara Basung dan sekitarnya, yang dikenal dengan nama suku “Sakai.” Suku ini terkenal sebagai suku terbelakang, yang oleh Pemerintah (Departemen Sosial) sedang diusahakan memasyarakatkan mereka dengan mengadakan pemukiman-pemukiman di Muara Basung.<sup>26</sup>*

This pressed ethnic group, in the research area, is found in the hinterland of the Mandau River, namely in Minas, Muara Basung and its surroundings, known as the “Sakai” tribe. This tribe is known as a retarded tribe, which the Government (Department of Social Affairs) is trying to socialize them by establishing settlements in Muara Basung.

Records of other negative connotations of the word “*sakai*” are also found in various researchers' notes in the past.<sup>27</sup> None of these researchers can explain why the word “*sakai*” is only used for certain groups of people, for example the people in the upper Mandau River area in the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom.

Other non-Muslim Malay-speaking communities in different areas within the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom are not referred to by the term “*orang sakai*”, but with different terms, for example “*orang hutan*” for non-Muslim communities in the interior of the islands of Bengkalis Island to Mendol Island, “*orang akit*” in the Morong Strait, Rupa Islands, or “*orang bonai*” in the Kubu River. This difference in terms for non-Muslim Malay-speaking people shows that “*orang sakai*” was not originally a pejorative identity, but was an identity that had a specific origin background to the existence of people in the upper Mandau River area of the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom.

The term “*sakai*” as a community identity is not only found in the upper Mandau River area in the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom in Sumatra, but can also be found in areas outside Sumatra. In the Malay Peninsula, the term “*sakai*” is also used for non-Muslim Malay communities there, but since the 1960s they have been referred to as “*orang asli*”.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the term “*sakai*” is also sometimes found in several Islamic Malay kingdoms in Kalimantan with the same function as the Islamic Malay kingdoms in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula.<sup>29</sup>

The existence of the term “*sakai*” as an identity in Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula and Kalimantan to refer to certain non-Muslim community groups or non-Muslim forest-based populations, is an indication that proves that the term “*sakai*” has a special background that has not been studied in depth by researchers. The use of the term “*sakai*” when reviewed in different scientific methods, for example in the historiological perspective, can be used as an indication to find the possibility of various historical fragments from communities identified as “*sakai*”.

The identity of “*sakai*” for the community in the upper Mandau River area in the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom in the past is clearly visible in the kingdom's law known as the *Kitab Bab-alkewa'id*<sup>30</sup>. Referring to the book published by Sultan Syarif Hasyim in 1898, the Sakai in the Mandau River are divided into two tribes, namely the “*Batin Delapan Sakai*” tribe and the “*Batin*

<sup>26</sup> Mantra, et al., *Adat Istiadat Daerah Riau*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> See Skeat dan Blagden, *Pagan Races*, vol. I, 14, 22, 528; Annandale dan Robinson, *Fasciculi Malayenses- Anthropology, Part I*, 47, 180; Dentan, *The Semai*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Nobuta, “Islamization Policy,” 481, Porath, “The Orang Batin,” 288.

<sup>29</sup> Porath, “The Orang Batin,” 288.

<sup>30</sup> There are two versions of the transliteration of this book. The first version from the Riau Province Regional Development Agency was published around the 1970s. The next version was published by the Siak Regency Bappeda in 2014.

*Lima Sakai*" tribe.<sup>31</sup> The *Kitab Bab-alkewa'id* in the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom at that time functioned as a regulation regarding the position of the head of government, regional administration, customary justice and sharia law, as well as various other customary matters and provisions that were not regulated in the regulations of the Dutch East Indies government (*Nederlandsche Hindie*) which was the main ruler at that time.

The existence of the term "*sakai*" to identify the community in the upper Mandau River in Bab-alkewa'id in 1898 shows that the word "*sakai*" is a special identity recognized in the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom. However, Porath (2018) stated that Max Moszkowski (1909) in his research emphasized that the name "*sakai*" was rejected by the community in the upper Mandau River and this community called themselves "*Orang Batin*".<sup>32</sup> Porath then used the word "pebatinan" to identify the community in the upper Mandau River, the same concept was also used by Sidauruk (2022) with the term "*suku pebatin*" to facilitate the differentiation of this indigenous community group from other indigenous community groups.<sup>33</sup>

So what is the correct identity to identify indigenous peoples originating from the upper Mandau River?

Referring to the existence of the term "*sakai*" in Bab-alkewa'id in 1898, it shows that the existence of the upper Mandau River community is a special identity that is part of the variety of Malay tribes in the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom. This identity can be used as a legality for the community in the upper Mandau River, because Bab-alkewa'id is a legal regulation that applies in the Siak Indrapura kingdom, a kingdom that later merged into the Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia.

The terms used in various studies on the identity of the upper Mandau River community are technical terms for scientific research used as a means to distinguish the existence of this community from other communities. This does not mean that the terms used by the researchers are wrong, but because Bab-alkewa'id, in addition to functioning as a law book, also functions as a customary reference book for the Malay community in the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom which is now part of Riau Province, the terms used in the book need to be a priority to identify the various ancient tribes in Riau Province. In addition, Bab-alkewa'id also clearly explains the names of the *hinduk* (sub-tribes) included in the "*Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*" and "*Suku Batin Lima Sakai*".

The tribal chiefs and their *hinduk* (*hindok*) chiefs who are included in the "*Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*" in Bab-alkewa'id are as follows:

1. Batin Meradjo Lela kepala suku Batin Delapan Sakai,<sup>34</sup>
2. Batin Beramban Sri Pauh Sakai, Hindok Sri Pauh,
3. Sutan Batuah Sakai, Hindok Sutan Batuah,
4. Batin Sebangar Sakai, Hindok Sebangai,
5. Batin Singa Meradja Sakai, Hindok Singa Meradja,
6. Batin Betuah Sakai, Hindok Batuah,
7. Batin Berumbung Sakai, Hindok Berumbung,
8. Batin Semunai Sakai, Hindok Semunai,
9. Beremban Petani, Hindok Beremban Petani.<sup>35</sup>

The position of the head of the "*Suku Batin Lima Sakai*" in Bab-alkewa'id is held by the Penghulu Mandau who is also the head of the Talang Mandau tribe.<sup>36</sup> The *hindok* of the "*Suku Batin Lima Sakai*" include the following:

- a. Batin Penasa Sakai, Hindok Penasa,

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<sup>31</sup> Jamil, *Bab-Alkewa'id*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Porath, "The Orang Batin," 289.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 289; Sidauruk, *Jejak Waris Buluh Bohal*, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Jamil, *Bab-Alkewa'id*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> For the *batin* list of *hindok*, see *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 18.



- b. Batin Belutu Sakai, Hindok Belutu,
- c. Batin Beringin, Hindok Beringin,
- d. Batin Tenganau Sakai, Hindok Minas (Hindok Tenganau)<sup>37</sup>,
- e. Batin Beremban Minas, Hindok Minas.<sup>38</sup>

In early documentation of the existence of Sakai from European records in the 19th century, such as Rijn van Alkamade and Hijmans van Anrooij who each published their writings simultaneously in 1884, have mentioned the existence of a community group on the Mandau River with the name *Sakai* and the existence of *Batin Lima* and *Batin Selapan*, which in Bab-alkewa'id are referred to as *Suku Batin Lima Sakai* and *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*. However, both authors could not mention the *batin* who were sub-tribes of *Batin Selapan* or *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*.

Information about the *Batin* that is included in the *Batin Selapan* or *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* was only found in the notes of Moszkowski (1909) who describes each inner self as follows:

*The name of the batin selapan are batin Madjilelo, considered as a kind of primus inter pares, with the kampong Pingger and Grosam bĕsar, the batin borumban Pĕtani with the kampong Ayer gumai, the batin sutan Bertoa with the kampong Si-tupang, the batin Smunai, kampong Paoh kayu mungkup, the batin Sinangar, kampong Bansal, the batin Bertoa, kampong Lubu. These six stay on the left side of the Mandau; they take their names too from the corresponding rivers. On the right side are the settlements of the batin Singa mĕradja kampong Samsam and batin borumban sri Paoh, kampong Paoh.*<sup>39</sup>

Moszkowski's statement then became the initial reference for European researchers in subsequent periods, for example Porath (2018) who mentioned the *Batin* of *Batin Selapan* or *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* as follows:

*These were the Batin Selapan (the eight Batin), who were: Batin Paoh, Batin Batuah, Batin Sebang, Batin Singa Meraja, Batin Berumbang, Batin Semunai, Batin Bramban, and Batin Pinggir.*<sup>40</sup>

The number of *Batins* mentioned by Moszkowski and Porath has a fundamental difference with the information in Bab-alkewa'id. Moszkowski and Porath mention the number of *Batins* of *Batin Selapan* consisting of eight *Batins*, while in Bab-alkewa'id it is stated that the number of *Batins* in *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai (Batin Selapan)* is nine consisting of one head of *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* and eight *Batins* from each *Hindok*. This difference shows that Moszkowski and Porath did not know about the existence of the Bab-alkewa'id document which is the law book of the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom at the end of the 19th century or in 1898.

Uniquely, Moszkowski believes that he was the first to know the names of the *Batin* from *Batin Selapan* because he did not clearly find the names on the map he obtained from the Batavian Topographical Institute (*Topografische dienst in Nederlandsch-Indië*).<sup>41</sup> Moszkowski drew this conclusion because he did not find the names of the *Batin Selapan* in the statements of Rijn van Alkamade or Hijmans van Anrooij written in 1884, the latter two authors only mentioning the existence of the *Batin Lima*. However, if we look at the Bab-alkewa'id which shows that the document was also legalized by the Resident of the Dutch East Indies,<sup>42</sup> which means that this document is also in the archives of the Dutch East Indies Government, it is clear that Moszkowski in his research did not coordinate or perhaps did not get access to the local government archives

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<sup>37</sup> There is a possibility that there was a typo by Muhammad Jamil, it should be "Hindok Tenganau". For correction see Jamil, *Bab al-Qawa'id*, 45-46.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Moszkowski, "The Pagan Races of East Sumatra," 708.

<sup>40</sup> Porath, "The Orang Batin," 292.

<sup>41</sup> Moszkowski, "The Pagan Races of East Sumatra," 707-8.

<sup>42</sup> See Jamil, *Bab-Alkewa'id*, 3, 46.

at that time. The local government, both from the Dutch East Indies government and from the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom, could not possibly not have Bab-alkewa'id, because this document was a regulation used in the implementation of government activities at that time. In addition, Moszkowski's ignorance of the existence of Bab-alkewa'id also shows that in his research process he never met one of the *Batin* he mentioned, because if he had met, he would have known the existence of the Bab-alkewa'id book which was the main reference for officials including the *Batin* from the *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* and *Suku Batin Lima Sakai* in the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom.

Referring to the year of the written record of the existence of the *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* and *Suku Batin Lima Sakai* and their *Batins*, the written statement in Bab-alkewa'id published in 1898 must be considered as the most accurate and oldest document in describing the identity of the *Batins* of the *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* and *Suku Batin Lima Sakai*. Moszkowski's note was published in 1909 or eleven years after the publication of Bab-alkewa'id.

Then, Bab-alkewa'id was an official government document and was used for the administration of government at that time, so that the identity of the *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* and *Suku Batin Lima Sakai* along with their *Batins* must refer to the information in Bab-alkewa'id, not based on Moszkowski's information.

The terms used by Bab-alkewa'id for the "*Sakai*" community are "*Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*" and "*Suku Batin Lima Sakai*" to distinguish two groups of people who actually have the same identity and culture. The difference is more likely caused by the political background regarding the division of the "*Sakai*" into two government groups that are subject to different rulers.

On the one hand, there is a group called "*Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*" as a group that used to be subject to the Kota Intan kingdom. On the other hand, there is the *Suku Batin Lima Sakai* group that recognizes the sovereignty of the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom.

In the process of identification as a customary law community, the existence of residents from the descendants of the ancient "*Sakai*" community who used to live in the area around the Mandau River needs to be clarified in their identity which can distinguish these residents from the various other customary law communities in Indonesia and in various parts of the world, for example in Malaysia. For this reason, it is proposed to use the term "*Suku Batin Sakai*" or it can also be abbreviated as "*Batin Sakai*" which is quoted from the term in Bab-alkewa'id but without using the words "*Delapan*" and "*Lima*" as a form of unity of identity of the two tribes previously referred to as "*Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*" and "*Suku Batin Lima Sakai*".

The two ethnic groups "*Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*" and "*Suku Batin Lima Sakai*" basically have the same background in terms of culture, history and genealogy. Diversification is more due to political struggles and local social dynamics, but does not eliminate cultural elements that are traces of the identity of the two tribes.

The use of the term "*Suku Batin Sakai*" is used as a distinguishing identity between communities that have genealogy with ancient communities in the Mandau River with various other (ethnic) communities that also have identities using the word "*sakai*" to clarify that the *Suku Batin Sakai* has a different historical background from other *Sakai* ethnic groups. This historical background will be explained further in the study that we will publish in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The identity as "*Sakai*" in the *Batin Sakai* Tribe community is often misunderstood as an insult to the community. The negative connotation attached to the context of "*sakai*" is one of the things that needs to be immediately corrected or fixed. This connotation causes a lot of distortion in the memory of the local community and is also an insult to a community that basically has a unique history and culture in the series of human civilization.

*Sakai* in history is a special identity for the allies in the hegemony of the Srivijaya Kingdom which is sacredly bound from generation to generation with the rulers and descendants of the

rulers of the Kingdom. As allies of Srivijaya and its descendants, Sakai did not fully submit to the Srivijaya Kingdom and still had the freedom to live and maintain their own culture from generation to generation. This is what explains why in the past, especially during the Islamic kingdoms that were once part of the Srivijaya Kingdom, the identity of "Sakai" can be found for groups of people who are resistant to cultural change but still recognize the sovereignty of the rulers of that time.

In the process of identifying the customary law community in the upper Mandau River, it is proposed to use the term "*Suku Batin Sakai*" as the identity name for the community, a name that is an abbreviation to unite the *Suku Batin Delapan Sakai* and *Suku Batin Lima Sakai* as previously stated in the Bab-alkewa'id along with all *Hinduk* who were previously united in both groups of the *Suku Batin Sakai*. However, the use of the identity as "*Suku Batin Sakai*" must first obtain an agreement from the community who are descendants of the *Suku Batin Sakai*. If the term "*Suku Batin Sakai*" is not agreed upon, then the old terms "*Suku Batin Delapan Sakai*" and "*Suku Batin Lima Sakai*" listed in the Bab-alkewa'id should be used to show that the historical traces and identity of the *Suku Batin Sakai* community are clear and can be accounted for.

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