

The Efforts of the Society in Preserving Ngarot Art in Lelea Village, Indramayu Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of local communities in preserving Ngarot art in Lelea Village, Indramayu Regency, West Java. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. The findings reveal that the preservation of Ngarot is sustained through ritual practices, oral transmission of cultural knowledge across generations, and the active engagement of local cultural institutions. This research underscores the critical function of community participation in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and highlights Ngarot as a living tradition that reflects local identity and collective memory.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as archipelagic region with various geographical conditions and a diversity of cultures present in Indonesia. Each tribe and ethnic group in Indonesia certainly has unique and distinctive local wisdom, such as speaking various regional languages and practicing different customs (Solehah et al, 2022). Local wisdom is a worldview and knowledge as well as various life strategies manifested in activities carried out by local communities to address various problems in meeting their needs. Etymologically, local wisdom consists of two words, namely wisdom and local. Other terms for local wisdom include local wisdom, local knowledge, and local genius (Njatrijani, 2018).

The definition of the term traditional ceremony is a symbolic human behavior that hopes for safety, which is a series of actions regulated by prevailing customs, and is related to various fixed events that usually occur in the respective society. Traditional ceremonies come in various types, but broadly speaking, they are divided into life cycle ceremonies, which are ceremonies that mark the transition from one phase to the next in life. Starting from the phase of pregnancy - birth - childhood phase - adolescence phase - adulthood phase - old age - death; and the ruwatan ceremony (meruwat). This ceremony is conducted as an effort to ward off misfortune and to attain prosperity. Included in this ceremony are rituals related to agriculture (Tresnasih & Lasmiyati, 2016).

Indramayu Regency is a regency in West Java Province, Indonesia. Its capital is Indramayu. This regency borders the Java Sea to the north, Cirebon Regency to the southeast, Majalengka Regency and Sumedang Regency, as well as Subang Regency to the west. The Indramayu Regency consists of 31 sub-districts, which are further divided into 313 villages and urban villages. Indramayu has a rich and distinctive cultural heritage and traditions. The community has a variety of traditional arts, such as wayang kulit, traditional dances, and regional music. In addition, there are also various festivals and cultural events held periodically, such as the Ngarot ceremony. The Ngarot Art Tradition is often closely linked to agricultural activities, especially in the context of the harvest season. This ceremony is not only an expression of gratitude for the abundant harvest but also a manifestation of appreciation for the hard work and perseverance of farmers in cultivating the land. Aspects of the Ngarot traditional ceremony have deep symbolism and cultural significance. Starting from the preparation process to the execution of the ceremony, each stage is filled with traditional values that honor ancestors, nature, and community togetherness. One of them is the Ngarot tradition in Lelea Village, Indramayu Regency (Suhaeb & Farhah, 2024).

As for the ngarot ceremony, it is different from traditional agricultural ceremonies in general. The most striking difference is in the participants of the ceremony, who are none other than the younger generation. According to Yuli (personal interview, 2024), the Ngarot activity was initiated to pray for the youth so that they may have lasting relationships in the future. This idea emerged from the concern of a kuwu who felt troubled by the lack of entertainment for the youth in the village. The kuwu then gathered them at the

village hall, gave advice on independence, and held entertainment in the form of masks and ketuk tilu. As time went by, more and more young people got involved. To support this activity, the village chief provided several rice fields whose yields are used to fund the annual event and the preservation of Ngarot culture, which eventually became an ingrained tradition in the village. The preservation of Ngarot art plays an important role in maintaining local wisdom in Indramayu Regency, which is part of Indonesia's cultural diversity. Local wisdom encompasses life values and knowledge passed down through generations by the community, as reflected in the traditional Ngarot ceremony. This ceremony is not only a form of entertainment but also a way to honor ancestors, nature, and the hard work of the community, especially in the context of agriculture.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This research uses an ethnographic approach within qualitative methods to examine the efforts of the Lelea Village community in preserving the Ngarot art. The ethnographic approach was chosen because the focus of this research is to deeply understand cultural practices, social interactions, and the dynamics of community life related to the Ngarot tradition. Ethnographic research is one of the approaches in qualitative research. Ethnographic research in the field of education is inspired by similar studies developed in the fields of sociology and anthropology (Sari et al, 2023). Through this approach, researchers can reveal how social and cultural relationships play a role in strengthening the preservation of Ngarot art in the community of Lelea Village, Indramayu Regency.

Studies on the Ngarot art have been conducted by several researchers. Like the study by Irmawati, on the Mythology of the Three Patterns in the Ngarot Tradition Procession of Jambak Village, Cikedung District, Indramayu Regency. In the Ngarot tradition, there are meanings, symbols, or patterns in its implementation. However, few people understand the meanings, symbols, or patterns contained in the Ngarot tradition. The Ngarot tradition ritual in Jambak village follows Pattern 3. Where in the procession order it starts from the Head Village's residence, circles around the village boundary, then returns to the Grand Mosque and ends at the Village Hall. The Ngarot tradition procession in Jambak village has local wisdom values and is an icon for the Jambak village community, including religious, social, educational, artistic, and linguistic values (Irmawati, 2022).

Study by Winoto by exploring the values in the Ngarot ceremony. This research aims to uncover the noble values contained in the implementation of the Ngarot traditional ceremony in Lelea Village, Indramayu Regency, West Java Province. The approach in the research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type of research. Based on the research results, it is known that there are several values that can be obtained from the implementation of the Ngarot traditional ceremony, namely the spirit of mutual cooperation; the symbol of exemplary behavior from community leaders for young people; the spirit to preserve the rice fields in Lelea Village as the rice barn of Indramayu Regency;

the use of flowers in crowns or on the head as a symbol to maintain dignity and honor for young women; and the meaning revealed in the mask dance movements that convey the moral message that human life is a process from birth, childhood, adulthood, and ending with death. Therefore, humans must always continue to create and do good according to their age stages in life (Winoto et al, 2021).

Then, the study by Riyanti that explores wise values and explicit messages that should be taught and preserved so that the lives of future generations continue to uphold the values and norms of the past. Due to the many shifts in values and norms within society, there is a need for school-based learning that incorporates local wisdom, especially in sociology subjects. This research uses a qualitative research method that is descriptive in nature. The data collection techniques used are observation and literature study. The result of this research is that educational institutions play an important role in realizing education based on local wisdom. Policies and implementation of character-based education that consider various values of local wisdom in schools become very important and strategic in building this nation. Local wisdom can serve as one of the sources of noble values for that purpose (Riyanti, 2018).

Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by exploring how the community of Lelea Village plays a role in preserving and developing the Ngarot art, both through active participation in traditional ceremonies, education, and art training. In addition, this research will also explore the contributions of other parties, such as the government and the arts community, in supporting these preservation efforts, as well as how technology and social media can expand the reach and connection of Ngarot art in the present era.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach to analyze the community's efforts in preserving the Ngarot art in Lelea Village, Indramayu Regency. Qualitative research is a research process to understand human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive picture that can be presented in words, reporting detailed views obtained from informant sources, and conducted in a natural setting (Fadli, 2021). The ethnographic approach was chosen because it can provide insights into cultural activities, social interactions, and the dynamics of community life related to the implementation of the Ngarot tradition. This ethnographic method involves data collection through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of community activities involved in the implementation of the Ngarot art.

In its implementation, ethnography emphasizes existing cultural aspects (Kamarusdiana, 2019). The researcher will be directly involved in social activities related to the tradition, including the Ngarot ceremony held in Lelea Village, to directly understand the existing cultural processes and meanings. Through observation, the researchers will study how the community preserves the Ngarot art, both in terms of the ceremony's execution, the involvement of the younger generation, and the community's efforts to maintain the tradition

amidst social and cultural changes. Interviews will be conducted with various informants such as local government officials, community leaders, and ceremony participants, to gain a broader understanding of the values contained in the Ngarot tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History and Implementation of Ngarot Art

Lelea Village is located in Indramayu Regency, West Java, with boundaries to Larangan Village in Lohbener District (north), Taman Sari Village (east), Pengauban Village (south), and Cempeh Village (west). Situated approximately 15.5 km from the capital of Indramayu and about 177 km from the capital of West Java Province, the village covers around 460,150 hectares, with rice fields occupying nearly 406,015 hectares. This has earned Lelea the title of "the rice barn" of Indramayu Regency. Farmers in the area are categorized into three groups: landowners, tenants, and laborers.

The Ngarot ceremony traces back to a figure named Ki Kapol, a respected community leader who gathered local youth at his home for celebrations. In appreciation, these youths assisted him in cultivating his 2,610 hectares of rice fields while also receiving lessons on farming techniques. Over time, this tradition evolved to include cultural performances such as mask dances, ronggeng ketuk, and jidur (Tresnasih & Lasmiyati, 2016). According to Raidi, the Head (Kuwu) of Lelea Village (direct interview, 2024), Ngarot represents a form of gratitude for the agricultural harvest and signifies the beginning of the planting season.

Ngarot is held annually on a Wednesday known as Rabu Wekasan, which falls between October and December. The choice of Wednesday is based on local belief—holding the ceremony on any other day is considered to bring misfortune (Zulia, 2017). On the day of the ceremony, young men and women—referred to as bujang and cuwene—begin their preparations at dawn. The cuwene adorn themselves with flower crowns placed by individuals with spiritual or ritual expertise and wear traditional attire complemented by gold jewelry, symbolizing natural beauty. Participants gather at the residence of the Kuwu or in the newly built pavilion nearby before parading through the village. The order of the parade is strictly organized, beginning with the Kuwu and local officials, followed by female officials' spouses, the cuwene, tanji musicians, the bujang, and local institutions, ending with community members who wish to participate.

The Role of the Community in Preserving Ngarot Art

Ngarot is a vital cultural heritage for the people of Indramayu. It integrates traditional dance, music, and drama to express philosophical values and communal identity. In the face of modern pressures, the role of the local community becomes essential in sustaining this tradition.

Preservation Through Education and Learning

Community involvement in education is a cornerstone of Ngarot preservation. Local wisdom is passed on through formal education and non-formal institutions such as art studios. These serve as environments where children and youth learn the dances, music, and meanings behind each ritual. Education rooted in ethnopedagogical principles fosters a deep understanding of cultural values from a young age (Soemantri et al, 2015), ensuring the sustainability of traditions like Ngarot.

Development and Strengthening of the Arts Community

Artistic communities offer platforms for sharing knowledge, practicing traditions, and staging performances. These performances function not only as entertainment but also as public cultural education. The community's active involvement—from children to elders—in organizing Ngarot reflects strong collective responsibility and strengthens social cohesion.

The Role of Local Government in Conservation Support

The Indramayu Regency Government, particularly through the Department of Culture and Tourism, plays an instrumental role in supporting Ngarot preservation. Support includes infrastructure development, funding, training, and designating Lelea as a cultural village. The inauguration of the pavilion (pendopo) in 2023 exemplifies such initiatives (Irhandayaningsih, 2018).

Utilization of Technology and Social Media

Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok provide new opportunities to promote Ngarot to a broader audience, including international viewers. Documentation and coverage of the event by Indonesian media have helped raise awareness and appreciation of the cultural richness of Lelea.

Awarding and Recognition of Ngarot Art

Recognition of Ngarot art at both national and international levels enhances its value and encourages its continuity. Community enthusiasm during performances further motivates the younger generation. In 2015, Ngarot was officially recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) by UNESCO, marking a significant milestone in its preservation.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the preservation of Ngarot art is influenced by the synergy between community involvement, education, cultural institutions, governmental support, and technological innovation. Ngarot serves not only as a cultural performance but also as a medium for transmitting values and strengthening community identity. Continued collaboration between stakeholders and the integration of Ngarot into educational and digital platforms are essential for ensuring its sustainability. The preservation of Ngarot is, therefore, not only a cultural responsibility but also a strategic effort to maintain the identity and local wisdom of the Indramayu people, particularly in Lelea Village.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the efforts of the local community in preserving Ngarot art in Lelea Village, Indramayu Regency, reflect a comprehensive and collaborative approach to sustaining intangible cultural heritage. These efforts are manifested through intergenerational participation, culturally rooted education, the support of cultural institutions, government involvement, and the strategic use of digital media. Ngarot functions not only as a traditional ceremony but also as a vehicle for transmitting values and reinforcing collective identity. Its preservation is therefore not only a form of cultural responsibility but also a strategic effort to safeguard local wisdom and community identity in the face of modernization.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research could explore the effectiveness of specific educational strategies used in transmitting the values embedded in Ngarot to younger generations. Additionally, studies may investigate the role of digital media in expanding the reach and impact of Ngarot beyond the local community, including its potential for cultural tourism development. Comparative research with other traditional ceremonies in Indonesia could also provide deeper insights into best practices for preserving intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, examining the dynamics between community initiatives and government policies may help identify more sustainable models for cultural preservation in the context of modernization.

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