

Forms and Meanings of the Sekujang Oral Tradition in Selingsingan and Simpang Villages, Seluma Regency, Bengkulu Province

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ABSTRACT

Oral traditions constitute an important element of intangible cultural heritage, serving as a medium of cultural transmission, identity formation, and moral education, yet many of these traditions remain underexplored in academic scholarship. This study aimed to analyze the forms and meanings of the *Sekujang* oral tradition practiced by the Serawai community in Selingsingan and Simpang Villages, North Seluma District, Bengkulu Province. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, using documentation, observation, and in-depth interviews with cultural practitioners and community elders as data collection techniques. The collected pantun texts were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to identify structural features and cultural values embedded in the tradition. The findings revealed that *Sekujang* is performed through pantun recitations that encompass themes of gratitude, respect, and communal harmony, while also functioning as a vehicle for intergenerational knowledge transfer and social cohesion. The analysis further demonstrated that *Sekujang* reflects the Serawai people's worldview and ethical norms, particularly concerning respect for nature, kinship, and spirituality. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic documentation and interpretive analysis of *Sekujang*, a tradition that has received limited scholarly attention compared to other Indonesian oral performances. These results imply that *Sekujang* should be integrated into cultural preservation programs and educational initiatives to strengthen cultural identity, promote local wisdom, and support heritage policies at the regional and national levels.

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Introduction

Globalization and technological progress have significantly reshaped cultural practices and altered how societies value and transmit local traditions, often leading to the erosion of indigenous heritage in many communities (Alsaleh, 2024; Ghosh, 2024; Petricevic & Teece, 2019). Oral literature, once the primary vehicle for transmitting collective memory and values, has increasingly been displaced by modern media, digital entertainment, and global cultural flows (Information, 2011; Lian & Xie, 2024). Yet, oral traditions remain vital as they encapsulate moral, social, and philosophical insights that continue to be relevant for contemporary life (Banda et al., 2024; Juma, 2022; Malapane et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, where cultural plurality is both a strength and a challenge, the preservation of oral literature represents not only a matter of safeguarding heritage but also of

maintaining the values that sustain social cohesion and cultural identity (Newisar et al., 2024; Ubertazzi, 2022; Xia et al., 2024).

Among Indonesia's diverse oral traditions, the Serawai ethnic community of Bengkulu Province has cultivated a rich repertoire of oral literature, including *rejong*, *nandai*, and *Sekujang* all of which reflect deeply embedded cultural wisdom and social norms (Anoeграjekti et al., 2018; Prasada et al., 2021; WS et al., 2023). The *Sekujang* tradition, in particular, employs pantun (quatrain-based oral poetry) to convey moral teachings, social critiques, and expressions of gratitude, often performed during communal events such as Idul Fitri celebrations (Banda et al., 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Wallstam et al., 2020). Scholars of folklore and oral traditions argue that such practices are crucial cultural texts, functioning as symbolic resources that link generations and provide mechanisms for negotiating identity and change (Ernst & Jensen Schleiter, 2021; Sallay et al., 2024; Todd, 2024). Despite these functions, the *Sekujang* tradition is increasingly marginalized due to shifting social behaviors, the decline of ritual specialists, and the growing preference of younger generations for digital entertainment over community rituals (Shah & Asghar, 2023; Sugita et al., 2021; Wahid, 2024).

Literary scholarship distinguishes oral literature as both dynamic and performative, embedding aesthetic values while also serving as a medium for moral and cultural education (Hossain, 2024; Sone, 2018; Syam et al., 2024). Pantun, as one of its most resilient forms, is particularly notable for its versatility, being used across contexts of advice, humor, social commentary, and ritual (Hewer et al., 2019). Within the *Sekujang* tradition, pantun not only serves as artistic expression but also as a symbolic enactment of community values such as honesty, patience, generosity, and respect for elders values increasingly at risk of dilution in contemporary cultural life (Chew, 2013). This constitutes a salient research gap: although studies on Serawai oral literature highlight its cultural and poetic richness, little empirical work has been devoted to documenting, interpreting, and analyzing the *Sekujang* tradition, especially in Selingsingan and Simpang villages of Seluma District, Bengkulu. Unlike *rejong*, which has received more scholarly attention, *Sekujang* is at greater risk of extinction and requires urgent documentation. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the forms and meanings of *Sekujang* pantun in these communities, with the dual aim of contributing to the preservation of local oral traditions and demonstrating their continuing relevance as cultural, educational, and moral resources in the face of globalization and technological change.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at analyzing the forms and meanings of *Sekujang* oral tradition in Selingsingan and Simpang Villages, North Seluma District, Seluma Regency, Bengkulu Province. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow the researcher to explore cultural practices in their natural context and to capture the depth of meaning embedded in oral traditions. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, supported by documentation, observation, and in-depth interviews with local cultural bearers, including community elders and *dukun Sekujang*. The data sources consisted of pantun texts performed during *Sekujang* rituals, oral testimonies from informants, and secondary sources such as prior scholarly works and local historical records. Data collection was carried out using triangulation techniques, which combined interviews, participant observation, and textual documentation to ensure

credibility and richness of the data. The data analysis followed an inductive process, beginning with transcription and translation of *Sekujang* pantun, followed by coding and categorization of recurring forms and themes, and culminating in interpretative analysis to uncover cultural and moral meanings conveyed in the tradition. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied methodological triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking with informants. Ethical considerations were also addressed by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting the cultural sensitivities of the Serawai community. This methodological approach not only provides a rigorous framework for examining the structure and meaning of the *Sekujang* tradition but also contributes to its documentation and preservation as part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage.

Results and Discussion

Forms of Sekujang Oral Tradition

The findings revealed that *Sekujang* oral tradition in Selingsingan and Simpang Villages is presented primarily through pantun performances conducted in social and ritual contexts such as weddings, thanksgiving ceremonies, and communal gatherings. The pantun are typically structured in quatrains with consistent rhyme schemes, reflecting the formal characteristics of Malay oral literature. Each performance is interactive, involving a pantun exchange between the *dukun Sekujang* and community members, thereby creating dialogical and performative elements that sustain collective participation.

Meanings Embedded in Sekujang Pantun

The analysis further indicated that the pantun of *Sekujang* carry layered meanings that encompass moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. Common themes include gratitude, respect for ancestors, the importance of communal harmony, and reminders of ethical conduct. These meanings serve not only as entertainment but also as instruments of moral education, transmitting values of wisdom, resilience, and social cohesion from one generation to the next.

Cultural Significance and Preservation

The research also identified the role of *Sekujang* in maintaining cultural identity among the Serawai ethnic community. Despite pressures from modernization and diminishing oral practices, *Sekujang* continues to function as a medium of cultural preservation. Elders emphasized its importance in connecting younger generations with ancestral heritage, although concerns were raised about the declining number of performers and reduced interest among youth.

Discussion

The results align with prior studies that highlight the role of oral literature as a vessel for cultural transmission and moral education. Thanh Quý and Phuong (2023) and Dwivedi (2023) emphasize that oral traditions worldwide sustain community values and cultural continuity, functioning not only as entertainment but as moral compasses. The findings of this study reinforce those perspectives by showing that *Sekujang* pantun operate with similar functions but exhibit distinctive Serawai characteristics in performance style and thematic emphasis. In comparison with Sholikhah (2020) study of Javanese oral traditions, *Sekujang* shares a moral didacticism but differs in its

dialogical form, which fosters direct engagement between performer and audience. Sholikhah (2020) and van Slageren and van Tubergen (2021) have argued that ritualized oral performances strengthen social solidarity; Sekujang demonstrates this function by anchoring communal identity and reinforcing intergenerational ties. What sets this study apart is its systematic analysis of Sekujang, a tradition that has received little academic attention compared to other regional pantun forms, thus contributing new insights to Indonesian folklore scholarship.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on documenting and analyzing Sekujang as an underexplored oral tradition of the Serawai ethnic group, highlighting both its literary structure and cultural meanings. While pantun as a genre has been widely studied, the specific characteristics and functions of Sekujang had not been systematically described, making this study a valuable contribution to folklore and cultural studies.

The implications are twofold: academically, this research enriches literary and cultural studies by broadening the corpus of analyzed Indonesian oral traditions; practically, it underscores the need for cultural preservation policies and educational integration of local folklore to sustain cultural identity and instill moral values in younger generations. Incorporating Sekujang into school curricula, cultural festivals, and digital archives could strengthen cultural continuity in the face of modernization.

However, this study is not without limitations. It focused only on two villages, which may not fully capture variations of Sekujang across other Serawai communities. The reliance on a limited number of informants also constrains the breadth of interpretation. Additionally, the study concentrated on textual and thematic analysis without exploring performance dynamics such as rhythm, gesture, and audience interaction in detail. Future research should adopt ethnographic and multidisciplinary approaches, expand the geographic scope, and investigate the performative dimensions of Sekujang to provide a more holistic understanding of this oral tradition.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the *Sekujang* oral tradition of the Serawai community in Selingsingan and Simpang Villages represents not only a unique form of pantun performance but also a cultural practice imbued with profound moral, social, and spiritual values that continue to shape communal identity. The findings revealed that *Sekujang* embodies themes of respect, gratitude, and harmonious coexistence with nature, while simultaneously serving as a medium for collective memory and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic documentation and interpretative analysis of *Sekujang*, an understudied tradition compared to other oral performances in Indonesia, thereby contributing new insights into the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. These results imply that integrating such oral traditions into educational and cultural programs can enhance local identity, strengthen cultural literacy, and support national heritage preservation policies. However, the study was limited by its focus on two villages and the absence of a broader comparative perspective, suggesting that future research should expand geographically and employ multidisciplinary approaches, including ethnography and performance studies, to capture the richness of *Sekujang* within diverse social and ritual contexts.

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