

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

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Abstract

This research aims to identify and understand the factors that affecting the efforts to preserve the *Ngarot* art in *Lelea* Village, Indramayu Regency through an ethnographic approach. By using qualitative methods, this research focusing on the analysis of various elements that play a role in the continuity of tradition that. The *Ngarot* traditional ceremony, which involves the participation of the younger generation in activities agriculture and local culture, have a role that is greater than just entertainment. This ceremony serves as a medium to instill important values in life, such as mutual assistance, respect for ancestors, and social awareness. This conservation effort is strengthened by education based on local wisdom, training, arts, and the development of an active arts community. In addition, support the local government through facilities and participation in funding, thereby strengthening the preservation measures. The use of technology and social media also paving the way for this art to be more widely recognized, so that it can be sustainable continuously maintained as a symbol of local wisdom that thrives in *Lelea* Village.

Keywords: Preservation of *Ngarot* Art, Local Wisdom, Indramayu Regency, Village *Lelea*, Cultural Tradition

1. 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.

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.

2. Research Methods

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.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. History and Implementation of *Ngarot* Art

Lelea Village to the north borders Larangan Village in Lohbener District, to the east Taman Sari Village in *Lelea* District, to the south Pengauban Village in *Lelea* District, and to the west Cempeh Village in *Lelea* District. The distance from *Lelea* Village to the capital of Indramayu Regency is approximately 15.5 km and to the capital of West Java Province is around 177 km. From the total land area of *Lelea* village, which is approximately 460,150 hectares, nearly 406,015 hectares are rice fields, making *Lelea* village known as the rice barn of Indramayu Regency. In the rice farming activities, the farmers are divided into three groups: landowning farmers, tenant farmers, and agricultural laborers.

The *Ngarot* ceremony is based on the event involving a community leader named Ki Kapol. During his lifetime, he enjoyed gathering the youth (young men and women) while holding feasts and drinks at his residence. Due to the affection of the young people towards Ki Kapol, as a token of gratitude, they collectively helped cultivate Ki Kapol's rice fields, which spanned 2,610 hectares at that time. That opportunity was also used to provide lessons on proper farming methods. The activity continues every year and has developed to include entertainment in the form of mask dances and ronggeng ketuk. After the Dutch colonial period, it was supplemented with the art of jidur (Tresnasih & Lasmiyati, 2016).

According to Raidi, the Kuwu or Head of *Lelea* Village (direct interview, 2024). The *Ngarot* activity is a form of gratitude from the people of *Lelea* Village for the blessings from their agricultural produce, marking the beginning of the villagers' return to

farming their fields at the start of this rainy season.

The traditional *Ngarot* ceremony has been passed down through generations and is held on the day of *rabu wekasan*, which falls between the months of October, November, and December. Wednesday is the absolute day for carrying out the *Ngarot* traditional ceremony, and the choice of Wednesday is based on the belief of the *Lelea* Village community, which holds that if it is not performed on Wednesday, calamities will come. In Java, this tradition is usually marked by various rituals aimed at avoiding disasters, especially on the last Wednesday of the month, which is considered a time vulnerable to calamities or disturbances (Zulia, 2017).

When the day of the *Ngarot* tradition arrives, the *bujang* and *cuwene* prepare their clothes from early morning, around 4:00-6:00 AM WIB. The preparations from the early

morning are usually carried out by the *cuwene*, as they need to be made over or adorned before the *Ngarot* traditional ceremony begins. In addition to being made up, the *cuwene* are also adorned with flowers on their heads, which is usually done by someone with magical abilities in placing flower crowns on the *cuwene*'s heads. When the makeup and head adornments are finished, the girls are decorated with gold jewelry, which aims to showcase the beauty inherent in their origin (the natural world). After the preparation of clothing and makeup is complete, the young men and women participating in the *Ngarot* traditional ceremony from each block are escorted to the house of the *Kuwu*/Head of the Village. However, in recent years, the *Kuwu* of *Lelea* Village has facilitated the construction of a pavilion in the rice field area, adjacent to his residence. After all the participants of the *Ngarot* traditional ceremony gathered

at the Kuwu's house at exactly 9:00 AM WIB, the *Ngarot* ceremony participants were invited to parade around the village.



Fig. 1. Poster of the *Ngarot* Traditional Ceremony (2024)

In the parade around the village of *Lelea*, there are rules regarding the order of the participants that have been established by the organizers of the *Ngarot* ceremony since ancient times. The order of the participants in the *Ngarot* tradition parade is as follows: the front row is filled by the village head (Kuwu) along with the

village head's wife, the district head (Camat), and representatives from the Indramayu Regency Government. Then followed by the wives of the village officials of *Lelea* and followed by the *cuwene* who are dressed in *kebaya* complete with flower decorations on their heads, and at the back accompanied by the *tanji* musical instruments. Right behind the *tanji* music players are the young men wearing *komboran* shirts and *pangsi* pants, along with headscarves. They are followed by the male village officials, then the institutions present in *Lelea* Village. The last row is usually filled by the community or families of the *Ngarot* traditional ceremony participants who wish to join the parade around *Lelea* Village.

3.2. The Role of the Community in Preserving *Ngarot* Art

Ngarot art is one of the most important cultural heritages for the people of Indramayu, West Java. This art form combines elements of traditional arts such as dance, music,

and drama to convey cultural messages and the life philosophy of the local community. As an important part of social and cultural life in Indramayu, *Ngarot* holds significant historical value, but its existence now faces various challenges. In facing these challenges, the role of the community becomes very important in the effort to preserve the *Ngarot* art so that it does not become extinct and remains preserved in the present era.

3.3. Preservation Through Education and Learning

One of the first steps that the community can take to preserve *Ngarot* is through education. The community in Indramayu needs to start by teaching this art form to the younger generation so that they not only recognize it but are also able to continue the tradition. Education can be conducted in various ways, whether through formal education in schools or non-formal education

through art studios or cultural groups.

Art studios or cultural groups in Indramayu often serve as the main places for the younger generation to learn and practice skills in *Ngarot* art. In this environment, children and teenagers are introduced to various aspects of *Ngarot* art, ranging from dance techniques, playing traditional musical instruments, to understanding the philosophy contained in every movement and song. In addition, a deeper understanding of this art material is also important so that they can appreciate the cultural values behind it. Education is a process of cultivating cultural values and local wisdom within a society that believes in and adheres to principles that have been passed down through generations. In education, there is a learning process, both in terms of value education and knowledge enhancement. The presence of local wisdom in society, which contains

good values, needs to be taught to the younger generation as early as possible so that the community develops good behavioral patterns towards nature and the social environment, and its existence is preserved. Therefore, the approach of local wisdom-based learning or ethnopedagogy in schools has become a new alternative in developing learning models aimed at introducing local wisdom values in culture to the younger generation, especially students (Soemantri et al, 2015).

3.4. Development and Strengthening of the Arts Community

The art community plays a significant role in the efforts to preserve *Ngarot*. In this community, traditional artists and other art enthusiasts gather to share knowledge, practice together, and develop the *Ngarot* art form. The art community in Indramayu is not limited to the artists who practice, but also involves the general public who are interested in preserving this culture. The art community can also

hold various performances that involve the wider public. These performances are not only intended to entertain but also to introduce *Ngarot* to people from various backgrounds, both local and from outside the region. This is important to create a shared awareness that the *Ngarot* art is part of the cultural identity that must be preserved.

The community is heavily involved in this *Ngarot* event, usually engaging elements of society, from children, teenagers, to adults, each with their own very important roles. Before the event takes place, the community collectively prepares everything needed for the event, such as making traditional food, arranging ceremonial equipment, and decorating the venue. All members of the community, both men and women, are involved in this process. In every aspect of the event, the principle of mutual cooperation is highly upheld. The community works together in preparing and executing

this event. This is not just about tradition, but also about strengthening the bonds of brotherhood among the villagers.

3.5. The Role of Local Government in Conservation Support

Besides the community, the local government also plays an important role in the preservation of *Ngarot* art. The local government, in this case, the Department of Culture and Tourism of Indramayu Regency, can play a role as a facilitator and main supporter of the efforts to preserve this traditional art. Support from the local government can include providing funds for art development, organizing training sessions, and facilities for art performances. Fostering and preserving traditional arts is very important to enhance love for local culture (Irhandayaningsih, 2018). One form of support provided by the Indramayu Regency government is the inauguration of the pendopo by the former Regent in 2023, and the plan to designate *Lelea*

Village as a cultural village. With this support, the community feels more motivated to preserve and maintain the *Ngarot* art.

3.6. Utilization of Technology and Social Media

In the current digital era, the use of technology and social media has become very important for introducing the art of *Ngarot* to a wider audience. The community, especially the younger generation, can utilize social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to share videos or documentation of *Ngarot* performances. Through these digital platforms, the *Ngarot* art can reach a wider audience, even extending to foreign countries. This can open up opportunities for *Ngarot* art to be recognized internationally, while also attracting the attention of tourists and art enthusiasts interested in local culture. The *Ngarot* activities held in *Lelea* Village.

Indramayu Regency has received widespread attention from various

media in Indonesia. This is because the *Ngarot* event is not only a unique and important cultural tradition for the local community, but also an attraction that showcases local wisdom and the cultural diversity of Indonesia. These media outlets are present to document the series of events and inform the public about the preservation of this tradition. With extensive coverage, the *Ngarot* activities are not only known among the local community but can also introduce the culture and local wisdom values of *Lelea* Village to a wider audience, as well as appreciate the diversity of Indonesian culture.

3.7. Awarding and Recognition of *Ngarot* Art

The awarding and recognition of *Ngarot* art, both at the national and even international levels, will have a positive impact on the preservation of this tradition. Awards will increase the motivation of artists to continue creating and preserving the tradition. In addition, the recognition of the

cultural values contained in *Ngarot* will strengthen the position of this art form within the broader Indonesian society. In addition to formal recognition, the community can also provide support through direct appreciation of the *Ngarot* art ceremony organized by the people of *Lelea* Village. With the presence of such enthusiastic spectators, the *Ngarot* art ceremony will continue to grow and thrive, especially in *Lelea* Village, Indramayu Regency. According to Raidi, the Kuwu or Head of *Lelea* Village (direct interview, 2024). In 2015, the *Ngarot* Tradition was designated as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a United Nations (UN) agency that focuses on Education, Science, and Culture.

4. Conclusions

This research aims to explore and understand the factors influencing the preservation of *Ngarot* art in *Lelea* Village, Indramayu Regency. After thorough analysis, it can be concluded that the preservation of *Ngarot* art in *Lelea* Village, Indramayu Regency, is greatly influenced by the involvement of various parties, including the community, government, and art community. The *Ngarot* traditional ceremony, which involves the younger generation in agricultural traditions and local culture, not only serves as entertainment but also as a means to convey life values, such as mutual cooperation, respect for ancestors, and social awareness. Through education based on local wisdom, art training, and the strengthening of art communities, the younger generation is taught to preserve this culture. Government support through facilities and funding also strengthens preservation efforts. In addition, the use of technology and

social media opens up opportunities for *Ngarot* art to be more widely recognized and to continue to be preserved. The preservation of *Ngarot* art is an important part of the effort to maintain the cultural identity and local wisdom of the Indramayu community, especially in *Lelea* Village.

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