

The Form of Culture in the Blarak-Blarak Sempal Game: A Study of Literary Anthropology

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the form of Javanese culture and cultural elements in the traditional game of Blarak-Blarak Sempal through a literary anthropological approach. Using descriptive qualitative methods, this study reveals cultural symbols such as coconut fiber that symbolizes attachment to nature, and pingsut that reflects deliberation and honesty. The poems and songs that accompany the game also describe important elements in the language and art system of Javanese society. These findings make an important contribution to enriching the understanding of the social and cultural values contained in traditional games, while highlighting the role of these games as a medium of cultural and moral education. The implications of the results of this study support local cultural preservation policies, especially in the field of education, by integrating traditional games as a tool to teach cultural values to the younger generation. In addition, this study opens up opportunities for further research related to the role of other traditional games in character formation and strengthening cultural identity among the community. Thus, traditional games such as Blarak-Blarak Sempal have great potential to be preserved and used as a means of learning noble values in community life.

Keywords: Blarak-blarak sempal; Cultural form; Literary anthropology

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is famous for its diverse ethnic groups with customs that are different from others. Hildred Geertz said that there are more than 300 ethnic groups spread throughout Indonesia, which causes Indonesia to become the country with the highest cultural diversity in the world (Riyadi, 2024). Cultural diversity is evident in various aspects of daily life, from language and culinary to art and belief systems of each ethnic group (Muta'allim, 2022). Each ethnic group has a unique cultural heritage, which is not only preserved but also appreciated as an integral part of national identity (Qolbi, 2024). One of the expressions of Indonesia's cultural richness is through traditional games (Atsar, 2017).

Traditional games are games owned by community groups and inherited from generation to generation that have various types of moral messages behind them (Lubis, 2018). Traditional games in general provide excitement to children and are universal so that games that appear in another area can be played simultaneously (Kurniati, 2016). From each area where there are traditional games, they have values that are very useful for children in the context of fantasy, recreation, creativity, and sports, which are also a

means of training to live in society (Djolo, 2020). Traditional games are not only a medium of entertainment or toys, but as a means of character formation that exists in the values contained and suitable to be implemented to children. In traditional games, many have symbolic ones related to local beliefs and traditions, which are often passed down from generation to generation (Hermawan, 2017). There are several Javanese manuscripts that explain that traditional games are recreative, one of which is *serat Rarya Saraya* (Suyumi, The Meaning of Philosophy in Javanese Dolanan Songs: A Study of Rarya Saraya Fiber, 2012). In the *Rarya Saraya* fiber manuscript, there are 60 kinds of traditional games that contain meanings and philosophies (Suyumi, 2018).

The traditional games contained in the *Rarya Saraya* fiber as a whole describe the community of its users, such as in the traditional game *Cublak-Cublak Suweng* which teaches about various meanings about honesty, cooperation, and togetherness which are the most important aspects of people's lives, especially in Java (Fibiona, 2021). However, in a study conducted by Patra Aghtiar Rakhman, et al. with the title "The Values of Local Wisdom in the Game of *Cublak-Cublak Suweng*: A Literature Study" explained that in the song *Cublak-Cublak Suweng* describes the community of its users who can provide moral abilities to children to look for property, position, and position that is not intact according to lust that is returned to the heart, and not get lost in the hereafter (Rakhman, 2023). However, in the study, there are several limitations in the form of less empirical data in analyzing the values of local wisdom in the *Cublak-Cublak Suweng* game, the lack of a symbolic approach, and the lack of discussion about the social context.

In addition, there are also other studies on the traditional game of *Sluku-Sluku Bathok* also describe togetherness and cooperation, such as in Rukiyah's research entitled "Instilling Character Values in Children Through Traditional Games" explained that the traditional game of *Sluku-Sluku Bathok* is very reflective of people's lives because the game of *Sluku-Sluku Bathok* has the meaning of cooperation, rhythm, and social sensitivity and the song also contains elements of advice and advice, which reflect local wisdom (Rukiyah, 2019). However, in this game there are also weaknesses in a less empirical approach and a less contextual approach. Therefore, this study can overcome the gaps in previous research with the addition of empirical data, a more in-depth approach, and an analysis of social and environmental aspects.

In relation to previous research on traditional games, it turns out that these games can describe the community of users (Feni, 2021). However, a traditional game that is not yet known about the relationship with the community is the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*. Therefore, it is necessary to study further with literary anthropology using the theories of Koentjaraningrat and I Nyoman Kutha Ratna. According to Koentjaraningrat (2015) there are 3 forms of culture, namely (1) The form of culture as a complex of ideas, ideas, values, norms, regulations and so on; (2) the form of culture as a complex of activities and actions that are patterned by humans in the life of the community; (3) the form of culture as objects made by humans. Ratna (2011) explained that there are seven cultural characteristics that are used in identifying the characteristics of literary anthropology, namely: equipment and equipment of human life, livelihood and economic system, social system, language, both oral and written, art with its various mediums, knowledge system, and religious system.

This study aims to describe the cultural form of the Javanese people in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game and describe the elements of the traditional *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game. With this research, it is hoped that it can add insight into the form of culture in traditional games and find out how the elements are contained in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game, so that the game can be preserved and also always played by the user community. This research is also important to see how the culture contained in the game can teach the younger generation about the importance of cooperation, local wisdom, and preserving

cultural traditions, as found in previous studies on other traditional games. The questions underlying this research include: (1) How is the form of Javanese culture reflected in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game? (2) What are the cultural elements contained in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The anthropological analysis of literature in the form of culture in the game *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* offers interesting insights related to cultural elements and cultural aspects contained in the symbols in it. Through qualitative research using descriptive methods, this research can explore symbols related to cultural aspects and cultural elements in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game that reflect the identity and cultural values related to the user community. This study was prepared as a case study with an emphasis on the game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*. By using this approach, the researcher was able to explore in more detail in analyzing the cultural form games in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game. This study includes data collection such as observation techniques, documentation, and interviews from sources who know about the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game (Fadilla, 2023). The use of this method aims to reveal how the cultural form contained in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game and offer a deeper understanding of symbols related to cultural aspects and cultural elements in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game.

Research Instruments

In this study, the researcher utilizes useful supporting instruments to strengthen the analysis results obtained from the study. According to the theory of study, there are 5 symbols contained in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game, namely coconut coir, pingsuit, holding hands, twisting movements, and balance between feet and hands. In addition, there are 2 cultural elements in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game, namely the language and art system with various types.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study has 3 processes, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. In qualitative research, data reduction is an analysis process by grouping and sorting an important data that has been collected through interviews, observations, and documentation stages (Fadli, 2021). In data reduction, data related to symbols and also data related to the elements contained in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game are collected and analyzed into one. The use of narrative data presentation whose data has been grouped according to the categories in the research (Waruwu, 2024). The presentation of data uses the form of tables to make it easier for researchers to analyze based on the shape of symbols related to cultural aspects and cultural elements. The final stage in this study is to draw conclusions to answer the research objectives that can be new findings that have never been researched before.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In this study, there are several data that have been found about the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game that reveal aspects of the symbols in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game where the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game is not just entertainment, but reflects the values of Javanese society as shown in the following table:

Table 1. Identification of Cultural Aspect Symbols in Blarak-Blarak Sempal Game

No	Symbolic forms related to cultural aspects	Information
1.	Coconut Coir	This symbol has a cultural meaning that reflects the strong attachment between the Javanese people and the surrounding nature.
2.	Pingsut (suit)	This symbol has a cultural meaning that prioritizes deliberation and honesty, so that it is in accordance with the principles of Javanese people who respect mutual decisions and respect between others.
3.	Holding hands	This symbol has a cultural meaning that emphasizes cooperation and mutual support, which reflects the unity and unity between one community and another.
4.	Circular motion	This symbol has a cultural meaning by reflecting harmony and attachment in accordance with the principles of Javanese society to prioritize cooperation and unity in achieving common goals.
5.	Balance between feet and hands	This symbol has a cultural meaning by reflecting the value of responsibility in accordance with the principles of the Javanese people to develop a sense of responsibility for the security and welfare of the Javanese people.

Not only that, data related to cultural elements in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game were also found as follows:

Table 2. Identification of Cultural Elements in *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* Game

No	Cultural elements in the game <i>Blarak-Blarak Sempal</i>	Types of Cultural Elements in the <i>Blarak-Blarak Sempal</i> Game
1.	Language system	Jenange tape Jenang dodol
2.	Art with its various types	Verses or songs of the game Blarak-Blarak Sempal

The data in tables 1 and 2 show the forms of symbols and cultural elements related to the cultural aspects in the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game which will be analyzed from the perspective of literary anthropology. These symbols and cultural elements are described as a meaning in the game *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*.

Discussion

In this result and discussion, there are 2 aspects that must be discussed, namely: the form of Javanese culture in the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* and cultural elements in the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*.

The cultural form of the Javanese people in the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*

The traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* is one of the cultural manifestations of the Javanese people that reflects social and cultural values. Here are some of the cultural forms reflected in this game:

Order of the Blarak-Blarak Sempal Game

Every traditional game has a function in the life of the community of its users, one of which is the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game. The *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game has a function

to hone physical abilities and has philosophical value in it (Ariani, 1997). This game is usually played by children in their free time and this game is not considered sacred for the people who use it. Therefore, this game is rarely glanced at or involved in Javanese traditions. This game has a special order when played by the player such as the process of preparation, execution, and closing.

Preparation

Preparation in traditional games is an important first step and is considered part of the ritual before entering the core of the game itself. During the preparation process, all parties involved are required to prepare the things needed so that the game runs properly. Players in the game of Blarak-Blarak Sempal must make some preparations before doing the game so as not to get injured while playing which are explained below.

Coconut coir

The game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* is a traditional game that uses coir or dried coconut shells (Pratama, 2018). Coconut coir is used when playing because it is a footrest so that the feet are not injured. In Javanese culture, coconut coir has an important role in various rituals and traditions of Javanese culture, especially in the context of traditional games, handicrafts, and traditional ceremonial rituals (Ulya, 2021). Coconut coir in the game *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* not only functions as a foot protector, but also symbolizes the attachment of the Javanese people to the surrounding nature. By utilizing the natural ingredients available in their environment, these games show local intelligence in creating safe and fun entertainment for children. This shows that the game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* is not only an ordinary game, but also a game that has the value of local wisdom. The above description can be corroborated by the words of the following cultural experts.

“Ning dolanan Blarak-Blarak Sempal kui nganggo sepet sing dadi piranti sing utama ning permainan kui. Sepet kui ora mung dadi piranti ning permainane tok, tur ono kearifan lokal ning simbol sepet kui. Contone, sepet kui dijupuk seko wit kambil, dadine dolanan Blarak-Blarak Sempal kui memanfaatke bahan bahan alam seng dadi nilai kearifan lokal.” (Sekar, 2024) “In the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game, coconut fiber is used which is the main tool in the game. The coconut coir is not only a tool in the game, but there is local wisdom in the symbol of the coconut coir. For example, coconut coir is taken from coconut trees, so the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game uses natural materials that are the value of local wisdom.” (Sekar, 2024)

From the presentation of the interview data above, it can be concluded that coconut coir has the value of local wisdom in the game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*. Coconut coir is not just a material used in the game, but also reflects the strong attachment between the Javanese people and the surrounding nature (Sukmawan, 2023). The use of coconut coir in this game shows local intelligence in creating safe and environmentally friendly tools. By using coconut fiber as a footrest, children can play freely without worrying about getting hurt. This shows how Javanese people utilize the natural ingredients available around them to create practical solutions in daily life (Suharson, 2024).

Pingsut (suit)

Pingsut atau suit used in the game Blarak-Blarak Sempal to determine the winning and losing groups. The suit in the game of Blarak-Blarak Sempal is an integral part that reflects wisdom and justice in Javanese culture. Suits, which are often used to determine the turn of play, contain local wisdom values that prioritize deliberation and honesty (Saepudin, 2016). In the context of Javanese culture, the suit is not just a method of drawing, but also a symbol of respect for mutual decisions and respect for fellow players (Laksana, 2021). The process of this suit teaches children the importance of honesty and sportsmanship from an early age, in accordance with the principles of Javanese people who value harmony and togetherness (Syamsurrijal, 2020). Thus, the suit in the game of

Blarak-Blarak Sempal is not only a practical way to manage the game, but also a means of learning the noble values of Javanese culture for the younger generation.

Implementation

The implementation process is a core part of the traditional game that will be performed. During this stage, the rules of the game are followed carefully, and every step that has been planned is implemented to ensure the game runs smoothly and according to the flow. The process of implementing the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* consists of 3 parts, starting with holding hands, circular movements, and balance between feet and hands. The core of the implementation of the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game will be explained below.

Holding hands

The traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* begins with players holding hands to form a circle. Holding hands in the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* is an important element and has significant meaning, both in practical and symbolic terms. Practically, forming a circle by holding hands provides an organized structure, facilitating the necessary coordination and cooperation in the game. It also serves as a safety measure, helping to prevent injuries and ensuring stability when moving. Symbolically, the handshake symbolizes togetherness and unity, reflecting social values that emphasize the importance of cooperation and mutual support in the game. The circle formed reflects unity and shared strength, reinforcing the sense of togetherness and harmony among the players. Thus, holding hands not only facilitates the game effectively, but also integrates and strengthens the cultural values that are valued in society.

Circular motion

In the game *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*, hold hands in a circular shape until you find a circular motion. Before that, players were divided into two groups through a suit to determine victory and defeat. Then the losing group sits with their feet thrown on coconut coir and the winning group stands between the two losing players and holds hands with each other (Sempal, 2024). After that, they rotated while singing the verses of the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game, namely *blarak-blarak sempal, diinciki mendal-mendal, keplere jenange tape, sandhung jekluk jenang dodol*. The longer it rotates and survives, the more the group wins.

From this description, it can be explained that the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game must have a circular movement according to the verses of the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* song. These spinning movements are an integral element of the game and reflect the harmony between physical activity and music that is part of the tradition (Restian, 2022). As players follow a circular movement that is in sync with the verse, they not only participate in the game physically but also take part in a deeper cultural experience.

The circular movement in *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* has a symbolic meaning that is closely related to Javanese cultural values. In Javanese culture, orderly and harmonious movement is often considered a reflection of balance and harmony in life. By performing circular movements at the same time, players create a form of unity that reflects harmony and attachment between players. This is in line with Javanese cultural principles that prioritize the importance of cooperation and unity in achieving common goals.

In addition, the hymns that accompany the game serve as a link between the musical and movement aspects, reinforcing the intended cultural experience. In the Javanese tradition, poetry and songs are often used to convey moral messages and social values. The singing that accompanies the circular movements in *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* not only adds to the excitement of the game but also teaches values such as discipline, patience, and respect for tradition. Overall, the game *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* combines song poetry

with circular movements showing how traditional games function both as a means of teaching and preserving Javanese cultural values. Through coordinated movements and harmony of singing verses, this game conveys a message about the importance of unity, cooperation, and respect for tradition in the daily life of the Javanese people.

Balance between feet and hands

In the traditional game of Blarak-Blarak Sempal, the balance between the legs and hands plays an important role in maintaining smoothness and safety during play. Since the game involves a variety of movements such as spinning and holding hands in a circle, physical balance and motor coordination are key. Children who participate in this game are taught to pay attention to their position and movements so as not to disturb or cause injury to themselves or their playmates. By maintaining a good balance between the legs as a support for the body and the hands to interact with other players, they can enjoy the game safely and full of fun.

The game of Blarak-Blarak Sempal is not only entertainment, but also reflects important social and cultural values in society. Through these games, children not only learn motor skills and coordination, but also understand the importance of cooperation and mutual trust between community members. They learn to appreciate each other's space and position in the game circle, while also developing a sense of responsibility for shared security and well-being.

In addition, Blarak-Blarak Sempal is often played in a broader social context, such as in community gatherings or in traditional celebrations. The game not only brings children together in fun activities, but also strengthens the social bonds between the members of the player (Hafidzah, 2024). This makes traditional games such as *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* an integral part of the community's cultural identity, which continues to be inherited and maintained from generation to generation.

Closing

In the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game, players clap and shake hands with each other to close the game. This tradition not only marks the end of the game, but also symbolizes appreciation and gratitude to all players. Applause and shaking hands provide an opportunity for players to express their appreciation and celebrate the togetherness that has been established during the game. The act of applause after the game is an expression of joy and appreciation for the efforts and participation of each individual. In Javanese culture, applause often symbolizes support and pride in shared achievements. This reflects social values that prioritize rewarding the hard work and contribution of each player. With applause, players show that they appreciate the experience that has been shared and foster a sense of togetherness. Shaking hands after the game is a symbol of mutual respect and strengthening relationships. In Javanese culture, shaking hands is a form of greeting that shows humility and politeness. It is a way to acknowledge social relationships and strengthen the bonds between individuals. In the context of the game, shaking hands after the game emphasizes the values of cooperation and solidarity, which are an important part of Javanese culture. This confirms that even though the game has ended, the relationships that were forged during the game remained strong and appreciated.

Overall, the closing of the Blarak-Blarak Sempal game with applause and shaking hands illustrates how traditional games are not only about entertainment, but also a reflection of deep cultural values. These actions underscore the importance of appreciation, cooperation, and social relations in Javanese society, as well as how these traditions continue to be preserved and appreciated in every aspect of life.

Cultural elements in the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*

Culture is an activity that occurs from generation to generation that is followed by descendants, culture occurs because of activities carried out by the community and then forms a culture (Fatonah, 2024). The community's practice of a tradition drives the existence of culture; two components are used in the study of cultural elements in the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal*: namely the language system and art with various types.

Language System

Language is a means for humans to communicate with each other. The language-related data found in the verses of the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game are in the following data.

Keplere jenange tape. (Suyami, 2018).

The data above shows the language in the form of a system of mentioning tapai thick porridge food by the Javanese people, namely as jenang tape. Jenang tape in the name of the Javanese people is tapai condensed porridge as a belief of the Javanese people in the context of traditional rituals and offerings. Jenang tape is believed by the Javanese people as a form of offering to ancestors or spirits that symbolize respect for the forces of nature and ancestors.

Sandhung jekluk jenang dodol. (Suyami, 2018).

In the next data, it shows the language in the form of a system of mentioning dodol thick porridge food by the Javanese people, namely as jenang dodol. Jenang dodol in the name of the Javanese people is a thick porridge of dodol as a belief of the Javanese people in the context of spiritual traditions. In some regions of Java, jenang dodol is often used as an offering in rituals to honor ancestors or spirits. According to the Javanese people, this food is believed to be able to connect the human world with the spiritual world so that it is served to the spirits of ancestors to provide blessings and salvation.

Art with its various types

Singing in the game Blarak-Blarak Sempal

The art form in the game *Blarak Blarak Sempal* uses poetry and singing in the game. It can be seen from the following data.

*Blarak-blarak sempal,
Dinciki mendal-mendal,
Keplere jenange tape,
Sandhung jekluk jenang dodol.*

The above excerpt of the verse shows that the song or verse of the *Blarak Blarak Sempal* game has been passed down from generation to generation with various versions. The verse of the song uses the language of the region where the game was created. The use of regional languages in singing verses not only enriches children's play experience, but also strengthens local cultural identity (Latuconsina, 2023). Through this poem, children are invited to know and appreciate their own regional language. They learn not only how to play the game, but also how to use the language appropriately in a traditional context like this.

The use of regional languages in the verses of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* also strengthens the sense of solidarity in the community. Children who learn and sing these verses together experience strong social bonds, which are built through the experience of sharing their

language and culture. This reflects one of the main functions of traditional games in strengthening relationships between members of society.

This research highlights the importance of cultural forms in the Blarak-Blarak Sempal game, especially in the community that uses it, to preserve the culture of the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game which is almost extinct in the current era. In addition, this study expands on previous research by focusing on the role of the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game which has a symbolic form related to cultural aspects and cultural elements. Novi Widya's research makes a high contribution related to the form of culture in traditional rituals which highlights the concrete form reflected in the community of its users (Utami, 2016). The findings in this study have important relevance in community culture and the preservation of traditional games that are almost never played. Therefore, this research can provide more information about the *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game in the future, so that it finally has the goal of providing opportunities for children to preserve the culture in Indonesia, especially in the context of traditional games.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis, it can be concluded that the traditional game of *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* from the perspective of literary anthropology shows that this game is a manifestation of Javanese culture that reflects local social and cultural values. The *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game involves the use of symbols such as coconut fiber, rotating movements, and hand holding, which symbolize continuity with nature, cooperation, and unity in society. In addition, the use of pingsut (suit) in the game symbolizes the importance of justice, deliberation, and being given to joint decisions in Javanese culture. This game teaches the values of cooperation, responsibility, and balance through the sequence of the game which includes preparation, implementation, and closing. The symbol of coconut fiber, for example, not only functions as a tool in the game, but also contains local wisdom values that reflect the harmony of Javanese society with its natural environment. The poetry used in the game also strengthens moral and educational values that are passed down from generation to generation. The *Blarak-Blarak Sempal* game is not just entertainment, but also an important means of preserving and passing on Javanese cultural values to the younger generation. Thus, this game plays a role in maintaining cultural identity and togetherness in society, as well as strengthening social relations between the communities that use it.

RECOMMENDATION

These findings point to the need for further investigation into the Blarak-Blarak Sempal game. These games can be preserved by including them in cultural, educational, or physical recreation activities, while also teaching the younger generation about local wisdom and the importance of maintaining a relationship with nature. The integration of these games with digital media, such as animated videos or interactive apps, can make them relevant and engaging for today's children.

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