

# Nonverbal Symbolism Meanings in *Gawai Dayak* Ritual and Their Relevance on *Sastra Nusantara* Learning in West Borneo

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Abstract: The object of this research is *Gawai Dayak* ritual practiced in several regions in West Borneo. Although *Gawai* is an annual ritual, it is merely regarded as a spectacle; the educational aspect is not yet exposed deeply and there is only few research talking about this ritual. Based on this fact, this research aims to identify the symbolism, especially non-verbal symbolism, applied on *Gawai* ritual. It is expected that the other enthusiasts can use the findings of this research to learn *Sastra Nusantara* (Literature of Nusantara) by looking at the degree of relevance of this research towards the *Sastra Nusantara* learning. This research applied qualitative method with semiotic approach by revealing the cultural symbolism.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This research is conducted in order to fulfill educational needs, especially in West Borneo regarding the implication of local culture towards education as a means to enrich and strengthen the local culture as a social identity for the people of West Borneo themselves. Due to the fact that the cultural richness is rarely regarded as a part of education, the researcher attempts to encourage people, especially the youth, to comprehend the values of cultural practices and actualize those values in the real life, instead of merely regard a cultural practice as somer spectacle. The cultural practice highlighted in this research is *Gawai Dayak* ritual.

The focus of this research is to reveal the nonverbal symbolism in *Gawai Dayak* ritual in West Borneo. The nonverbal symbolism used in this research emphasizes on the physical symbolism used in *Gawai Dayak* ritual. Specifically, this research aims to reveal the meanings of the offerings used in *Gawai Dayak* ritual. Based on the result of nonverbal symbolism analysis, the researcher identifies its relevance towards *Sastra Nusantara* learning, especially the learning outcome, in West Borneo. Learning outcome is a term used in KKNI (*Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia*/ National Qualification Framework) based curriculum and in DIKTI National Standard. DIKTI National Standard is the national educational standard implemented

obligatorily in universities in order to achieve the national education goal. Learning outcome is the ability achieved through the internalization of knowledge, attitude, skill, competence, and cumulative working experience (Presidential Regulation No 8 Year 2012, article 1 about National Qualification Framework). The findings of the result are expected to be used as a learning material reference in *Sastra Nusantara* subject in West Borneo.

Presidential Regulation No 8 Year 2012, article 1 about National Qualification Framework formulates six points regarding norms and values: 1) being taqwa to the God Almighty, 2) having good moral, ethic, and personality in achieving every objective, 3) showing high and prideful nationalism as well as supporting global peace, 4) being cooperative and having social awareness towards the society, 5) showing respect towards diversity of cultures, point of views, beliefs, religions, and opinions, and 6) upholding the law and prioritizing the nation and society. Meanwhile, DIKTI National Standard formulates six points of attitude as follows: 1) being taqwa to the God Almighty, 2) upholding the religious, moral, and ethical values in achieving every objective, 3) contributing in the improvement of quality of life on the society and nation based on Pancasila 4) showing high and prideful nationalism 5) showing respect towards diversity of cultures, point of views, beliefs, religions, and opinions, 6) being cooperative and

having good social awareness towards the society, 7) upholding the law and prioritizing the nation and society 8) internalizing academic norm, value, and ethic; 9) showing high responsibility, and 10) internalizing spirit of independence, tenacity, and entrepreneurship.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Overview of *Gawai Dayak* Ritual

Conceptually, *Gawai* ritual is similar to the other rituals practiced on the other places, similar both on the purpose and the system of the ritual; like *Petik Pari* ritual practiced in Sumberpucung village in Malang East Java. Kamsiadi et al. (2013) ever studied about *Petik Pari* ritual. In his research, Kamsiadi et al. expound that *Petik Pari* ritual is a symbol of thankfulness to the God Almighty for the abundant harvest (2013: 65). Naganag in his research analyzes *Gibus/Palanus* ritual practiced in Kalinga province, Philipine. This ritual is practiced after all activities in the farm have been finished. This ritual is done with some offerings like chicken, pork, and grape sugar (*bayas*) and it is practiced on the farm or on their own houses. This ritual is the symbolism of thankfulness to gods and goddesses as well as “*Kabunian*” for the abundant harvest as well (2013: 345). There is a similar ritual practiced in Cigugur, Kuningan called *Seren Taun* ritual. This ritual also has the same purpose, it is to show thankfulness to the God Almighty for the harvest (Kurnia, 2014: 304). Similarly, *Gawai Dayak* ritual practiced in West Borneo is one manner to show thankfulness to god (*Jubata*) for the abundant harvest by providing some offerings as a way to communicate to Jubata as well as to the ancestral spirits.

In the practice, *Gawai Dayak* ritual is diverse, meaning it has different ritual based on the purpose and the place it is held. One of the rituals is *nyangahatn*. *Nyangahatn* has several steps with different name and place one to the others, like *nyangahatn* in living room, *nyangahatn* in baluhor *langko* (granary), and the last is *nyangahatn* in *padarengan* (rice jars) (Ivo, 2012L 293). Based on the initial findings on the symbolism in *Gawai Dayak* ritual, the researcher designs the steps in conducting the research. First of all, the researcher identifies and sorts the symbols, so the researcher can get the nonverbal symbolism. Nonverbal symbolism is divided into three; non consumable offerings, consumable offerings, and gestural

symbolism in the form of ritual dance. After the identification, the researcher emphasizes on the consumable and non consumable offerings symbols. Those offerings are made from the nature and livestock. The non consumable offerings include *ai'pasasahatn*, lime paste, *kobet*, and chicken blood; while the consumable offerings include *poe*, cucur, rice (normal and pulut), egg, and chicken or pork.

### 2.2 The Nature of Culture

*Gawai Dayak* ritual is a part of culture functioning as the identity of Dayak people, indigenous people of West Borneo. As the part of Dayak culture, *Gawai* ritual reflects the life of Dayak. Consistently, this concept is in line with the experts' concepts of culture, like Dockery (2009: 9) who states that every culture has their own values which relate to religious values reflected and realized in symbolism, language, and several cultural practices. Meanwhile, White (1949: 139-140) explains that culture is an organization shaped by custom, object (tools and/or product of the community), ideas (belief, knowledge), and sentiment (attitude, values) which are expressed through symbolism. Based on this notion, it can be understood that by understanding symbolism; the customs, ideas, attitudes, and values of certain community can be identified. Therefore, through symbolism analysis can be identified the form of culture on certain communities. It is supported by Milner (2002: 11) who states that culture refers to the connection of communities, artefacts, and practices which form a symbolism body. The concept of symbolism in this research refers to any use of symbols which do not come from verbal sources.

### 2.3 Cultural Symbolism

Symbolism is a part of norm in a culture. As the part of a norm, symbolism possesses certain values relating to the life of certain community. Hence, it is true that symbolism is used to represent certain ideas (Liliweri, 2005: 154). According to Miller (2011: 23), symbolism is the use of symbols in the form of objects, words, or behaviors; of which the meanings can be interpreted culturally, which can represent something indirectly. Meanwhile, Boshc emphasizes that symbolism is the framework of actions and practices which are integrated in communal experience (1991: 79). Geertz (1973: 91) states that symbolism is used to refer certain objects, actions, events, qualities, or relations which function as a

conceptual means to explain the symbols themselves. The strength of symbolism compared to the other parts of norm is that it can express something the others cannot. It is supported by Sari who states that symbolism is more expressive than human speech. Symbolism may contain expression which is hard to define or even undefinable. Symbolism is unique as it gives deeper understanding over sacredness and cosmological reality which the other manifestations cannot express (2004: 58).

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative method with semiotic approach. Cruse (2006: 2) states that semiotic is the study of signs which generally includes every single sign either visual, gestural, smelling, or the other kinds. Further, Salimi et al. (2016: 58) figure out the other signs included in semiotic specifically like nonverbal and metaphorical signs, symbols, or even physical artefacts. The data resources in this research included human and non human sources (Endraswara, 2012: 207). Human sources are data coming from informants. The informants of this research were Mr. Puspojosius, 48 year old, lives in Lingga village, Ambawang; Mr. Yakobus, 49 year old, lives in Sulebagus hamlet, Korek village; and Mr. Wewen, 60 year old, Sulebagus hamlet, Korek village. Meanwhile, non human sources are data coming from anything other than humans; it can be from books, documents, reports, and photographs. The data collection techniques used in this research were direct observation, recording, and interview. Direct observation and recording were conducted when the ritual was practiced while the interview was conducted outside the ritual practice to elicit informations from several influential figures with deep knowledge on everything related to Gawai ritual.

### 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Poe* symbolizes the men-Dayak. This analogy is based on their dominant roles in making the offerings; besides the shape of this consumable offering looks like men genital. This offering is made of pulut rice which makes the texture of this offering is flexible and sticky after being cooked. The word "flexible" represents a solid yet elastic matter which can be pulled or pushed into several shapes (Adams, 2006: 37). The characteristics of

pulut rice represents the characteristics of men Dayak in general who is flexible; do not easily give up and can easily adapt to the society. These traits are the major factors that make them able to annex the jungles. Meanwhile the word "sticky" represents the unity and the strong bond among Dayak people.

The above expounding is supported by Puspojosius (interview result on 2/18/2018) who states that pulut rice can unite Dayak as a tribe. This unity is resembled during land cultivation. Meanwhile, according to Bakueng and Yustina (interview result on 2/18/2018), the unity of Dayak people is resembled when they together fight for a Dayak woman who is demeaned by someone. Based on the expounding above, it is implied that *poe* symbolizes two major traits of the men Dayak in general; they do not easily give up and they have a strong bond and affection. Their trait for not easily giving up is affected by their harsh environment which forces them to be strong; eventually this condition shapes their independence and tenacity. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning in the aspect of internalizing independence, tenacity, and entrepreneurship. Their independence and tenacity can be seen on their ways of life which depend much on the nature. However, their hard and simple life do not make desperate, instead it shapes them to not easily give up. Their not easily giving up trait has relevance to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning in the aspect of being taqwa to the God Almighty and showing religious attitude. According to Khalid, being not easily give up is a singular aspect that can shape the perfection of faith (2014: 253).

*Poe* as the symbol of unity is closely relevant to *Sastra Nusantara* learning. It contributes to improve life quality that is in line with the principle of *Pancasila*. *Poe* contributes in improving life quality since it creates more united atmosphere. It becomes more united due to the existence of *GawaiDayak* ritual. Through the ritual; every tribe, either from the same or different tribe, coming from different status is united.

Besides *poe* as an offering used as a symbol of Dayak's life balancer, there is *cucur* or *tumpisunguh* as a complementary symbol of *poe* in *GawaiDayak* ritual. *Cucur* is an offering that symbolizes women of Dayak. This happens since it is the women of Dayak who have dominant role in the process of *cucur* making. In addition, as we notice the shape of *cucur*, it resembles women genital organ. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome especially in internalizing the spirit of independence, tenacity, and entrepreneurship. According to Fletcher,

internalization is a mental process that happens because of the principles and culture embraced by a certain social group where we grow up (2007: 45). Through the use of *cucur* as a symbol, the independence and struggle of women of Dayak are portrayed. In the process of *GawaiDayak*, the women are actively involved as the committee or the doers of the ritual itself. Meanwhile, when agricultural cycle begins, the women of Dayak do and finish the job assigned to them in the jungle.

Moreover, with the existence of the offering, the people of Dayak acknowledge the existence and role of women of Dayak. The acknowledgment and the reward of the people on the existence and role of women of Dayak is relevant with *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome specifically in being cooperative and having good social awareness towards the society.

Furthermore, this contributes on improving the quality of life based on the principles of *Pancasila*. In making *huma*, Dayak people still make it mutually. This phenomenon is in line with the idea of Pusposyosius (2018) who states that Dayak people still conserve *balale'* as their farming system in which they can cooperatively farm. Since they farm cooperatively, their sense of unity is improved. In the process of *huma* making, both of men and women of Dayak are involved. Even elders, teenagers, and children take part in that process. The women of Dayak involvement in *huma* making contributes in improving tolerance without considering the gender.

The symbolism in the use of lime paste (*sekapursirih*) in *GawaiDayak* ritual has a tendency on Dayak social relationship. The symbolism of *sekapursirih* is analyzed based on its characteristics. First, it symbolizes the characteristic of group of people who do not want to disadvantage others. This analogy is made based on the way that plant grows. It grows on other plants without harming the plants where it grows. This is relevant with *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome especially on religious aspect. It shows someone's religious attitude that affects the way they maintain relationship with the nature. It happens since there are religious principles that govern the way how human should interact with the God, others, themselves, and nature (Feisal, 1995: 27).

The characteristic that one has in which they do not want to disadvantage others implies the peaceful atmosphere. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in terms of improving life quality based on the first principle *Pancasila* which is believing in One Supreme God. Na'imah et

al. (2017: 3) in their research state that religion has to be source of human strength so that they can feel peaceful and prosperous. The research done by Na'imah et al. aims to respond various interfaith and inter tribe conflicts that usually happen in Indonesia and Thailand. As stated by Na'imah et al; in order to prevent the conflicts, there should be inclusive religious education (2017: 18).

Another symbolism is the use of betel nut tree (*pinang*). Based on the characteristic of this tree, it has straight stem that resembles candle. Although it has no branches, betel nut tree produces many fruits in every stalk. This represents Dayak's lifestyle that follows the principles of righteousness, honesty, modesty, and life as it is. However, beside the modesty, the people of Dayak are generous and caring. In accordance with this study, there is an idea proposed by Buchari that the real characteristic of Dayak is innocence and modesty (2014: 119). This is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome particularly in religious aspect which is being taqwa to the God. According to Ayuhan (2016: 51); in Islam, honesty is a commendable attitude. By being honest, one will grow up having good and gorgeous personality.

Calx in *Gawai Dayak* ritual symbolizes sincerity, gentleness, and implicit bravery. This symbolism comes from the color of the calx itself and how the calx is made of. Calx is made of clamshells which are burnt to ashes then whitened and finally solidified into soft substances (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993: 74). It can be understood that calx is made of hard substances which undergo several processes and become soft.

The white color of calx symbolizes the character of Dayak who basically prioritizes sincerity in doing interaction with both their own people and outsiders while the soft texture symbolizes the gentleness of Dayak people despite their harsh living. The function of calx, which is used to redden betel leaf, symbolizes that beyond sincerity and gentleness of Dayak lies bravery. It is implied on their fearlessness in interacting with the nature in order to fulfill their daily needs as well as in standing against any tribe who tries to treat them unjustly.

In relation to the definition of sincerity, Ya'kub (2004: 78) says that sincere in action is to max out any effort physically and mentally. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in the aspect of being taqwa to the God Almighty and showing religious attitude. Sincerity is close to religiousness which leads to the true happiness (Woly, 2008: 158), since the nature of everything comes from the God. Therefore, sincerity

implemented in daily life can hinder someone from being dependent to the others rather than to the God Almighty alone.

In Islam, it is stated that whoever is not gentle, is not one of the wise who can place anything on the right place; they are also far from being the servants of Ar Rahman (ArRisalah, 2006: 36). Gentleness is a commendable attitude as it is far from individualism, instead it shall bring togetherness and harmony in society (ArRisalah, 2006: 22). This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in the aspect of being taqwa to the God Almighty and showing religious attitude. Taqwa and religious attitude are shown by doing one of the God's commands to always establish good relationship with the other men (*Hablum Minannas*).

Besides resembling sincerity and gentleness, the use of calx also symbolizes bravery. This symbolism is derived from the function of calx itself to redden betel leaf. It represents that beyond the sincerity and gentleness of Dayak people lies bravery. According Maridjan (in Baharuddin, 2013: 231), bravery is an attitude to always fulfill the obligation and responsibility no matter what. Religiously, according to Hamzah and Hamzah, bravery is the way someone shows their faith; for without bravery, despair shall dominate. Moreover, in any religion, being desperated is forbidden since despair is a sign of disbelief to the Oneness of the God Almighty (2006: 99). In Islam, one is not allowed to be feared to anything but the God Almighty alone (Faris, 2006: 113). The bravery represented on the use of gambier (*gambir*) warns us to not be feared to anything but Allah and to be always optimistic in facing this life.

Lime paste also uses gambier. Although gambier is sour in taste, it exactly makes chewing betel leaf tasty. The sour taste of gambier and the effect it makes symbolize that although this life is rife of suffering, Dayak people realize that suffering is the part of life, that has to be faced, which eventually makes them strong and tenacious. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in the aspect of being taqwa to the God Almighty and showing religious attitude. According to Umar (16: 2014), tenacious people are those who surrender anything to the God Almighty while according to Zabady (2013: 99), tenacious people are those who are noble in character.

Another symbolism in the use of gambier in lime paste is bravery. According to Hamzah and Hamzah, bravery is the way someone shows their faith; for without bravery, despair shall dominate. Moreover, in any religion, being desperated is forbidden since

despair is a sign that one disbelieve the Oneness of the God Almighty (2006: 99). In Islam, one is not allowed to be feared to anything but the God Almighty (Faris, 2006: 113). The bravery represented on the use of gambier warns us to not be feared to anything but Allah and to be always optimistic facing this life.

The next symbolism is the use of *ai' pasasahatn*, which symbolizes sanctification. This symbolism comes from the nature of water which is pure; colorless, odorless, and tasteless; and functions as a means to make something clean. The symbolism of purity; colorless, odorless, and tasteless; represents the character of Dayak people in blending into society. Dayak people are often show themselves as it is; they are humble, difficult to manipulate the situation. Therefore, Dayak people is renowned for their innocence which often makes them easy to be controlled by the other people for their own benefit (2014: 144). It is supported by Nitipawiro, in his forewords, who states that due to the innocence of Dayak people, they are easily persuadable. The symbolism of *ai' pasasahatn* is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in the aspect of being taqwa to the God Almighty and showing religious attitude that any religion teaches people to be always clean up the physical and mental bodies through sanctification from any negative manifestation.

Egg offerings in *Gawai Dayak* ritual symbolizes asking for protection over the crops to *Jubata*. The symbolism of protection is resembled on the characteristics of egg itself which contains a new life form or embryo; hence, it represents the coming to the next stage of life. In facing the new stage of life, Dayak people hope and pray once again to *Jubata* for the protection over themselves and the protection over the crops from pest, similar to the egg crust protecting the embryo. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in the aspect of being taqwa to the God Almighty and showing religious attitude. The relevance is on the act of asking for help and protection to god (*Jubata*). In Islam, Rasulullah SAW ever preaches to Ibnu Abbas r.a to always pray to Allah SWT alone, because it is He alone who has the right to be asked for help (Al-BughadanMistu, 2014: 138). Someone who always pleads and prays only to Allah is a group of believers (Amva, 2010: 307).

The next symbolism is on the chicken offering which represents a sacrifice served by the humans to *Jubata*. Faqieh (2008: 57) states that sacrifice is symbolized by the animal slaughtering as exemplified by Prophet Ibrahim when he was asked

to sacrifice Prophet Ismail. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in the aspect of being taqwa to the God Almighty and showing religious attitude. Sacrificing, in Islam, is the way to express thankfulness. Thankfulness obliges us to always sharing and giving with the others. During the *Gawai Dayak* ritual, chicken and the other animal sacrifices are also shared and eaten together.

The last symbolism is *kobet*. Kobet represents a unity and oneness of purpose Dayak people have. Kobet includes several different offerings which reflect the purpose of Dayak people to live together in harmony. This symbolism is relevant to the *Sastra Nusantara* learning outcome in the aspect of contributing in the improvement of the quality of life on the society based on the third principle of *Pancasila*, the unity of Indonesia. Kobet symbolism warns Dayak people to always uphold the principles of unity regardless the diversity of Dayak sub-ethnics and languages. The spirit of unity does not only affect their culturalism but also nationalism in a broader sense.

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