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Cultural Values in Bengkulu Folk Tales: An Analysis of *Folk Stories from Bengkulu 2* by Naim Emel Prahana

Fridiawan Surya Kencana[1*]
[1]Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Folklore functions as a vital medium for preserving cultural identity and transmitting moral values, yet Bengkulu folktales remain underexplored in academic research compared to other regional traditions in Indonesia. This study aimed to analyze the cultural values contained in *Cerita Rakyat dari Bengkulu 2* by Naim Emel Prahana to classify and interpret the moral and social wisdom embedded within the narratives. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with data collected through documentation of selected folktales and analyzed using content analysis to identify recurring themes. The analysis focused on four relational domains: human–God, human–nature, human–human, and human–self. The findings revealed that the folktales convey religious devotion, ecological awareness, social solidarity, and personal integrity, demonstrating that local wisdom is deeply interwoven into narrative structures. These results indicate that folklore in Bengkulu not only entertains but also educates and preserves community identity by transmitting values across generations. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic categorization of cultural values within Bengkulu folktales, an area seldom addressed in prior literature. The implications suggest that integrating regional folklore into educational curricula can enhance cultural literacy, strengthen character education, and support the safeguarding of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage, while future studies should adopt broader ethnographic approaches to capture folklore in its living context.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR
Fridiawan Surya Kencana, Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Indonesia. Email: frediawan45@gmail.com

Introduction

Literature has long been regarded as a medium through which human thoughts, emotions, and cultural experiences are articulated in imaginative and aesthetic forms, encompassing poetry, prose, and drama. As a cultural artifact, literature functions as both a reflection and a construction of social realities, bridging individual imagination with collective traditions (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Potvin, 2024; Triandafyllidou & Kumar, 2024). In its oral form, literature represents a community's worldview, transmitted across generations through narratives, songs, and proverbs, serving both aesthetic and didactic purposes (Abdul Aziz et al., 2023; Benabbes & AbdulHaleem Abu Taleb, 2024; Nkansah, 2024). Oral literature not only conveys entertainment but also embeds ethical values, social norms, and cultural wisdom that shape collective identity and continuity (Nursalam et al., 2024; Sone, 2018; Syam et al., 2024). In Indonesia, with its plurality of ethnic groups and cultural practices, folklore plays an indispensable role in

preserving diverse local traditions while strengthening national identity (Amin & Ritonga, 2024; Banda et al., 2024; Zou & Priscilla, 2023).

Folklore, as a form of oral tradition, represents a symbolic system that embodies moral instruction, social cohesion, and cultural resilience (Banda et al., 2024; Larimian et al., 2020; Qi et al., 2024). Scholars argue that its value lies not only in its narrative content but also in the symbolic practices through which it is performed and received (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Merino et al., 2024; Rintamäki & Saarijärvi, 2021). In Indonesian contexts, folklore is deeply embedded in local educational practices, providing a contextual foundation for character building and cultural preservation (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024; Thanh Quý & Phương, 2023). Bengkulu, one of Indonesia's provinces with a rich cultural heritage, possesses a wealth of folklore that reflects values of spirituality, social solidarity, environmental stewardship, and personal integrity. However, unlike widely studied folklore traditions such as *Malin Kundang* from West Sumatra or *Timun Mas* from Central Java, Bengkulu's oral traditions remain underexplored in scholarly literature (Dahwal & Fernando, 2024).

The collection *Cerita Rakyat dari Bengkulu 2* by Naim Emel Prahana, published in 1997, provides a rich repository of local narratives that encapsulate cultural values across four relational domains: human–God, human–nature, human–human, and human–self (Banda et al., 2024; Irvine et al., 2019; Varzakas & Antoniadou, 2024). These narratives highlight values such as prayerfulness, piety, and surrender to God; sustainable use of natural resources; cooperation, advice, affection, sincerity, and obedience in social interactions; as well as humility and self-respect at the individual level. Prior research has established that folklore is a valuable medium for transmitting such cultural and moral values, functioning as a pedagogical tool for both formal education and informal community learning (Amponsah, 2023; Banda et al., 2024; Wiysahnyuy & Valentine, 2023). Yet, few studies have systematically analyzed Bengkulu's folklore with a focus on its embedded cultural values and their relevance for character education in contemporary contexts (Dahwal & Fernando, 2024; Gamage et al., 2021; Zheng & Stewart, 2024).

The contemporary challenge, however, is that younger generations increasingly perceive local folklore as outdated and irrelevant, preferring globalized narratives disseminated through digital media (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Ferreira Caceres et al., 2022; Mutanda, 2024). This shift threatens not only the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage but also the cultivation of values necessary for building national identity and resilience (Banda et al., 2024; Gocer et al., 2024; Lugo-Espinosa et al., 2024). Although previous research has examined folklore in other Indonesian provinces, focusing on its functions in cultural preservation and education (Boboc et al., 2022; Irawan et al., 2022; Sagita Krissandi et al., 2023), systematic studies of Bengkulu folklore particularly those analyzing the cultural values in Prahana's collection remain scarce. This underrepresentation limits both academic knowledge and practical utilization of Bengkulu's folklore in character education and cultural revitalization programs.

This research, therefore, seeks to address this gap by conducting a qualitative descriptive analysis of *Cerita Rakyat dari Bengkulu 2* by Naim Emel Prahana, focusing specifically on identifying and interpreting the cultural values contained within these narratives. By categorizing values into relational domains human God, human nature, human human, and

human self this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Bengkulu folklore embodies moral, social, and educational principles that are relevant for both cultural preservation and pedagogical innovation. The objective is not only to document and analyze these values but also to highlight their potential contribution to contemporary education, particularly in fostering character formation and strengthening local identity amidst globalization.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the cultural values contained in the collection of folktales *Cerita Rakyat dari Bengkulu 2* by Naim Emel Prahana. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of textual content and the interpretation of cultural meanings embedded in folklore. The primary data source consisted of the folktales themselves, supported by secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and prior research on folklore and cultural studies. Data were collected through documentation techniques by systematically reading, coding, and classifying narrative elements that reflect cultural values. The analytical procedure followed a content analysis approach, which involved identifying textual segments, categorizing them into thematic domains such as human God relations, human–nature relations, human–human relations, and human–self relations and interpreting their significance in the context of local wisdom. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was applied by comparing primary texts with secondary scholarly sources, while peer debriefing and theoretical validation further reinforced interpretive accuracy. Ethical considerations were observed by acknowledging all sources appropriately and respecting the integrity of the original literary works. This methodological framework provides a systematic and rigorous foundation for analyzing Bengkulu folklore, contributing both to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and to the enrichment of cultural literacy and character education in Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

Cultural Values in Human–God Relations
Analysis of the folktales revealed strong religious and spiritual dimensions, particularly emphasizing values such as faith, gratitude, and obedience to divine authority. Stories often highlighted the consequences of neglecting religious norms and the rewards of piety. These narratives function as moral guidance for society, reinforcing the integration of cultural traditions with spiritual life.

Cultural Values in Human–Nature Relations
The texts frequently portrayed harmonious interactions between humans and nature, underlining values of respect, preservation, and ecological balance. Natural elements such as rivers, forests, and mountains were depicted not only as physical settings but also as moral agents influencing human conduct. This reflects the local wisdom that positions humans as custodians of nature, a perspective still highly relevant to contemporary environmental education.

Cultural Values in Human–Human Relations

The folktales consistently emphasized social values such as cooperation, justice, honesty, and respect for authority. Kinship and community solidarity were depicted as essential to maintaining social harmony, while stories of betrayal or conflict served as cautionary tales. These values illustrate how folklore transmits ethical frameworks that regulate interpersonal relationships within the community.

Cultural Values in Human–Self Relations

The stories also conveyed values associated with self-discipline, perseverance, humility, and responsibility. Characters were frequently depicted as undergoing personal struggles that required resilience and moral integrity. This highlights the role of folklore in fostering internalized moral reflection and personal character development.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Bengkulu folktales serve as repositories of cultural values spanning spiritual, ecological, social, and personal domains. This aligns with prior studies indicating that folklore functions as a medium for transmitting moral and cultural values across generations (Banda et al., 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Gülüm, 2023). Similar to Schniter (2018) and Sone (2018), this research underscores the role of oral traditions as tools for social regulation and cultural preservation. Furthermore, the ecological values identified resonate with global discussions on indigenous environmental knowledge, as documented in Syahputera (2024) anthropological studies and Niigaaniin and MacNeill (2022) work on cultural ecology, suggesting that Bengkulu folklore contributes to broader environmental discourses.

Compared to other regional studies, such as those by Bimantara (2024) on Balinese folklore and Sagita Krissandi (2023) on Javanese oral traditions, this study highlights a distinct emphasis on the integration of spiritual and ecological dimensions within Bengkulu narratives. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic classification of cultural values into four relational domains human–God, human–nature, human–human, and human–self providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing local folklore that has not been sufficiently explored in previous scholarship.

The implications of these findings are significant for both education and cultural preservation. For educators, Bengkulu folklore can be integrated into character education curricula to instill moral values, critical thinking, and cultural literacy. For policymakers and cultural practitioners, this research emphasizes the importance of safeguarding oral traditions as part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage in line with UNESCO's cultural preservation frameworks.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations. First, it relies exclusively on textual sources from a single published collection, which may not fully capture the performative and contextual aspects of the oral tradition. Second, the scope is geographically limited to Bengkulu, making generalization to other regions tentative. Finally, the study does not account for contemporary reinterpretations of folklore by younger generations, which could provide additional insights into the evolving role of folklore in modern society. Future research should therefore employ

ethnographic and participatory approaches, broaden its geographic scope, and examine the dynamic reception of folklore among contemporary audiences.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the folktales contained in *Cerita Rakyat dari Bengkulu 2* by Naim Emel Prahana embody diverse cultural values that can be classified into four relational domains: human–God, human–nature, human–human, and human–self. These values highlight religious devotion, ecological awareness, social solidarity, and personal integrity, reflecting the worldview and moral compass of the Bengkulu community. The findings affirm that folklore serves not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a cultural repository that transmits wisdom, ethical principles, and local identity across generations. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic categorization of cultural values within Bengkulu folklore, which has received limited scholarly attention compared to other Indonesian oral traditions. The implications suggest that integrating regional folklore into formal education can strengthen cultural literacy, foster character development, and support the preservation of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its reliance on a single textual collection and the absence of ethnographic validation, indicating the need for future research that combines literary analysis with field-based approaches to capture the living dynamics of folklore in its social context.

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