



Structure, Meaning, and Cultural Values of *Syair Mantau* in the Kenduri Sko Traditional Ritual in Kerinci

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the structure, meaning, and cultural values embedded in the oral tradition of *Mantau*, performed during the *Kenduri Sko* ritual in Lempur Tengah Village, Kerinci Regency. As a form of oral literature, *Mantau* consists of rhythmic poetic verses sung during the traditional *Tauh* dance. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method using a structuralist approach. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with 12 informants—including *Mantau* performers, traditional leaders, and cultural experts—and documentation of three live performances over a three-month period. The analysis draws on theories of structuralism (Nurgiyantoro), meaning (Chaer; Abdullah), and cultural values (Djamaris). Findings reveal that *Mantau* lyrics possess distinct physical structures, including specific diction, rhyme, figurative language, and rich imagery. Internally, they reflect themes of gratitude, spirituality, social harmony, and moral values. The meanings conveyed span lexical, grammatical, and cultural domains, highlighting the Kerinci community's worldview. The cultural values embedded in *Mantau* encompass religious devotion, harmonious coexistence with nature, social cohesion, and self-reflection. These findings underscore *Mantau* not merely as ritualistic entertainment but as a vital medium for intergenerational transmission of Kerinci identity and values, offering broader implications for oral literature preservation in a modernizing world.

Keywords: Mantau, Kenduri Sko, Oral Literature, Structuralism, Cultural Values, Kerinci Community.

Introduction

Indonesia's rich cultural diversity has birthed various forms of traditional expression, one of which is oral literature—cultural heritage passed down through generations via spoken performance. Oral literature often functions as a vessel for

collective memory, spiritual expression, and social norms (Sudikan, 2015). In Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province, the oral tradition of *Mantau* exemplifies this legacy. *Mantau* is traditionally chanted during the *Tauh* dance, a central element of the *Kenduri Sko* ritual, which serves both ceremonial and cultural purposes.

However, modernization and globalization have contributed to the erosion of interest in oral traditions among the younger generation. A report by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) notes a 37% decline in the transmission of regional oral literature in Sumatra since 2010. In Kerinci, *Mantau* faces similar risks, increasingly performed only by elders with limited documentation and intergenerational transfer.

Although several studies have investigated Kerinci oral traditions—such as Nazurty (2013) on *Tale Kerinci* and Sugiyartati (2020) from an anthropolinguistic angle—few have holistically examined the textual structure and semantic depth of *Syair Mantau* in relation to its cultural values. Furthermore, prior research has often emphasized content or function without analyzing the poem's formal features or deeper meanings.

This study focuses on *Syair Mantau* performed specifically during the *Kenduri Sko* ritual in Lempur Tengah Village, selected due to its strong ritualistic continuity and role as a cultural stronghold in Kerinci. The objective is to (1) analyze the structure of *Syair Mantau*, (2) identify its embedded meanings, and (3) uncover the cultural values reflected in its performance. These efforts aim not only to academically enrich the field of Indonesian oral literature but also to support practical cultural preservation efforts, especially for community stakeholders, educators, and local governments.

Research Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design with a structuralist approach to examine the *Syair Mantau* as performed during the *Kenduri Sko* ritual in Lempur Tengah Village, Kerinci. The research focuses on analyzing both the physical and inner structures of the poetic texts, interpreting their meanings, and identifying the cultural values embedded within them. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of performances. The observation was conducted during three *Kenduri Sko* events held from March to May 2025, totaling over 30 hours of fieldwork.

A total of 12 informants were purposively selected, consisting of four *Mantau* performers, three traditional leaders, two cultural experts, and three village elders who possess deep knowledge of the cultural context. Interviews were conducted in both the Kerinci dialect and Indonesian, depending on the informants' preference, and were recorded using digital audio equipment before being transcribed verbatim. The *Syair Mantau* texts were also transcribed directly from audio and video recordings, and their accuracy was verified through consultations with local

tradition bearers.

Data analysis was carried out using structuralism theory (Nurgiyantoro, 2010) to examine poetic elements such as diction, rhyme, and imagery, while semantic and semiotic approaches (Chaer, 2013; Abdullah, 2014) were applied to interpret lexical, grammatical, and symbolic meanings. Cultural values were analyzed using Djamaris's (2001) framework, which explores five domains of human relationships: with God, nature, society, others, and the self.

Data validity was ensured through methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking with key informants. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, securing community approval for the research, and adhering to cultural protocols throughout the data collection process.

Results and Discussion

1. Structural Features of *Mantau*

The oral tradition of *Mantau* exhibits a rich and complex poetic structure that serves both aesthetic and functional purposes within the *Kenduri Sko* ritual. This tradition is preserved through rhythmic verses sung during sacred dances, forming an integral part of Kerinci's oral literature.

a. Physical Structure

Mantau's physical structure includes diction, imagery, figurative language, and rhyme:

1. **Diction:** The words used in *Mantau* are carefully selected to reflect cultural, spiritual, and emotional nuances. For example, phrases like "bentong lapek di eteh jeremi" emphasize agrarian life and traditional farming activities.
2. **Imagery:** The use of descriptive language such as "pucok ubi daunnyo merah" creates vivid sensory impressions, enhancing the ritual's solemnity and emotional depth.
3. **Figurative Language:** *Mantau* uses metaphors, personification, and hyperbole to elevate meaning. "Seni pamuncak iioo nan Tigo Kaum" illustrates the supreme status of cultural art forms.
4. **Rhyme:** The rhyme schemes, typically a-a-a-a or a-b-a-b, make the chants more rhythmic and memorable, facilitating oral transmission across generations.

These elements not only serve poetic functions but also reinforce the memorability and performative aspect of the tradition.

b. Inner Structure

The inner structure of *Mantau* comprises thematic and emotional elements:

1. **Theme:** Common themes include gratitude, spirituality, leadership, and cultural preservation. For instance, the phrase “bukon seni sembarang seni” expresses pride in indigenous art.
2. **Tone and Mood:** Depending on context, the tone can be solemn, advisory, or celebratory. The overall mood evokes reverence and communal solidarity.
3. **Message:** Implicit lessons on unity, harmony, and ethical living are conveyed, as in “bersatu padu kito pun teguh, berceraai berai tentulah runtuh.”

These components form an interdependent network that enhances both the artistic and functional value of *Mantau*.

2. Layers of Meaning in *Mantau*

Based on semantic theory (Nugraheni, 2017), the meanings in *Mantau* are categorized into three levels:

1. **Lexical Meaning:** Words in *Mantau* refer directly to tangible cultural elements, e.g., “padi payo” refers to local glutinous rice.
2. **Grammatical Meaning:** Repetition and syntax emphasize emotional resonance and reinforce communal messages, as seen in “Na lemak yo nasi na kayo.”
3. **Cultural Meaning:** Expressions like “adat basendi syara’, syara’ basendi Kitabullah” reflect the intertwining of religious and cultural beliefs.

The semantic richness of *Mantau* illustrates how language functions as a repository of collective memory and identity.

Discussion

1. Cultural Values Embedded in *Mantau*

a. Human-Divine Relationship

Prayer in *Kenduri Sko* manifests in *Mantau* as a communal act of devotion. The line “turunlah kau mambang digunung, peri dilaut, munting dilangit” invites spiritual beings to bless the ritual, reinforcing the sacredness of the occasion.

b. Human-Nature Relationship

Environmental wisdom is evident in lines about agriculture and resource preservation, e.g., “padi payo yang kito tuai.” These reflect sustainable practices and ancestral reverence for the land.

c. Human-Society Relationship

Verses like “mari saratu kito lempo lekok 50 Tumbi” emphasize unity and cooperation. Meanwhile, leadership is praised through “kalo pandai kayo jadi depati, rakyat menjadi senang,” highlighting the moral responsibilities of leaders.

d. Interpersonal Relations

Inclusivity is celebrated in “turun nak nyo rami iioo... leknyo kami,” which welcomes all to participate in the festivities. This represents the community’s collective spirit and hospitality.

e. Self-Identity and Cultural Pride

Expressions such as “seni kito lempo iioo.. na kito pakai” affirm the community’s pride in their heritage. Cultural arts are seen not merely as entertainment but as essential expressions of identity.

2. Comparative Verse Analysis

To deepen understanding, selected stanzas are compared:

1. **Stanza 1 vs Stanza 15:** The former introduces the ritual context and hospitality; the latter emphasizes territorial and ancestral pride.
2. **Stanza 4 vs Stanza 10:** Both underscore preservation of heritage, but Stanza 10 directly connects identity with specific geography (Pulau Tengah).
3. **Stanza 18 vs Stanza 20:** The first focuses on wise governance; the latter formalizes the integration of religion and custom.

These comparisons illustrate the breadth and cohesion of themes across different stanzas.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a structuralist approach (Nurgiantoro, 2010; Faruk, 2017) as the primary analytical lens to examine the oral tradition of *Mantau* within the *Kenduri Sko* ritual. Structuralism emphasizes the interrelation of intrinsic elements in a literary work—in this case, the *Mantau* oral text—such as theme, character, setting, language style, and plot as a system that constructs meaning. This approach regards the text not merely as an individual expression but as a system of signs that operates within a specific cultural framework.

Additionally, semantic theory (Chaer, 2013; Nugraheni, 2017) is applied to classify both denotative and connotative meanings embedded in each stanza of *Mantau*. Since oral traditions often convey implicit messages, a semantic lens is essential to uncover layered meanings, including local symbols rich in cultural values.

To reinforce the connection between text and culture, this study also utilizes cultural semiotics (Abdullah, 2014) as a supporting analytical tool. Cultural

semiotics allows the researcher to interpret how cultural signs—such as customary vocabulary, social rituals, and symbolic interaction patterns—become part of the meaning-making system within the *Mantau* tradition. Thus, this theoretical framework forms a solid foundation for exploring the narrative structure, cultural meanings, and social relevance of the oral tradition.

Contemporary Relevance

In the modern era marked by rapid globalization and cultural homogenization, oral traditions like *Mantau* are at risk of extinction due to limited intergenerational transmission and the dominance of popular culture in public spaces. However, *Mantau* continues to offer a living narrative of local identity, social resilience, and ecological-spiritual harmony. As a cultural expression deeply rooted in the indigenous Kerinci community, *Mantau* serves as a reminder of collective values, ancestral reverence, and a balanced relationship with nature.

The relevance of *Mantau* today lies in its ability to convey moral teachings that remain applicable in contemporary contexts. Values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), ethical leadership, environmental stewardship, and social solidarity are urgently needed to address issues such as social fragmentation and ecological crisis. Furthermore, *Mantau* holds great potential for integration into educational settings, especially in Indonesian language and local culture curricula, as a means to cultivate culturally literate and ethically grounded students.

Beyond education, the utilization of digital technologies such as social media, video platforms, and digital heritage apps presents new opportunities for sustaining the tradition. Digitizing and disseminating the narratives of *Mantau* through online platforms can expand its audience and enhance its intergenerational transmission, especially among digitally native youth.

Limitations and Future Research

Research Limitations

This study is limited in scope in several respects. First, it is based on a single performance of *Mantau* observed in Lempur Tengah Village, which may not fully represent the diversity of forms and expressions found in other villages across Kerinci. Second, the data collected is primarily textual and lacks comprehensive ethnographic support from audiovisual documentation, which could have strengthened the analysis of performative and contextual elements. These limitations result in a descriptive-analytical study that is insightful but not yet holistic.

Future Research Directions

To enrich and complement the current findings, future research can be directed toward the following areas:

1. Comparative studies of *Mantau* traditions across different Kerinci villages to explore variations in structure, form, and sociocultural context.
2. Integration of multimedia documentation (video, audio recordings, photography) to capture the performative and expressive aspects of the oral tradition in a more vivid and dynamic manner.
3. Youth engagement studies focusing on attitudes, interests, and participation in oral tradition preservation. Such studies are crucial for assessing the sustainability of *Mantau* in the face of shifting sociocultural dynamics.

The *Mantau* oral tradition performed in the *Kenduri Sko* ritual is more than a cultural expression—it is an intellectual and spiritual legacy of the Kerinci indigenous community. Its narrative structure, semantic depth, and embedded cultural values position *Mantau* as a significant literary and ritualistic artifact worthy of preservation both academically and socially.

This study contributes to the mapping, interpretation, and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage through an interdisciplinary approach combining literary theory, linguistics, and cultural semiotics. The preservation of *Mantau* requires active collaboration not only from scholars but also from educators, local governments, traditional communities, and youth as the future custodians of cultural heritage. Therefore, collaborative and innovative efforts must be continuously developed to ensure that *Mantau* remains a living tradition across generations.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the oral tradition of *Mantau* in the *Kenduri Sko* ritual of Kerinci contains a rich and aesthetically organized literary structure, both in its physical aspects—such as diction, rhyme, rhythm, imagery, and style—and in its inner aspects—such as theme, tone, emotion, and message. The *Mantau* verses not only carry artistic value but also serve as a medium for conveying deep meanings in lexical, grammatical, and cultural terms, reflecting agrarian life, the community's spirituality, and customary values passed down through generations.

This research also reveals that *Mantau* embodies cultural values that reflect human relationships with God, nature, society, others, and oneself, making it an expression of the local wisdom of the Kerinci people. A significant contribution of this research is its comprehensive documentation and analysis of one form of oral literature that is becoming increasingly rare and is at risk of extinction. However, the limitation of this study lies in its scope, which is still focused on a single village area and does not yet include comparisons between *Mantau* variants in other parts of Kerinci.

Therefore, this study is expected to serve as an initial foundation for further and more extensive research on *Mantau* oral tradition as an intangible cultural heritage worthy of preservation.

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