



The Role Of Bale Sarasehan in Maintenance and Preservation of Local Culture Identity in Cireundeu Traditional Village

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ABSTRACT

Cireundeu traditional village is one of the traditional villages in West Java that still keeping its noble values applied to the community from generation to generation. These noble values are also applied through one of its architectural cultural products, Bale Sarasehan. Its existence is very important in terms of functional and symbolic aspects. Functionally, Bale Sarasehan acts as a gathering place for the community to carry out various traditional activities that can strengthen social ties and cultural values inherent in their identity, such as religious ceremonies, traditional art performances and space to transmit and pass on cultural knowledge to the younger generation. While the building is symbolically conveyed through its architectural form and the use of materials in its structure, it also has a connotative meaning or message about the life teachings of its community. This research use limited field study method with a qualitative approach and collects data through observation, interviews, and documentary studies. This research is expected to gain a better understanding of the role of Bale Sarasehan, to contribute to the sustainability of the maintenance and preservation of local wisdom as a local cultural identity in Cireundeu traditional village.

Key words: *Indigenous village, Cireundeu, Bale Sarasehan, culture.*

INTRODUCTION

Cireundeu Traditional Village is one of the traditional villages in West Java, part of pluralistic and heterogeneous country. At least there were 5 other traditional villages often mention in researches regarding traditional village of West Java; The Kampung Naga, Kampung Dukuh, Kampung Urug, Kampung Pulo and Kampung Ciptagelar. Different religions, tribes, cultures and customs grow and develop in the land. It is the diversity that forms Indonesia's identity as a nation. Preserving this cultural heritage so that it can be recognised and understood by future generations is one of the things should be done. One of the ways that cultural preservation is done is by supporting the preservation of existing traditional villages.

According to Koentjaraningrat, a traditional village is a village whose inhabitants belong to a traditional society and maintain the customs and cultural values of their ancestors (Koentjaraningrat, 1979). In 2012, according to the West Java Regency/Municipality Tourism and Culture Office, there were 27 traditional villages in West Java Province, one of which was a traditional village located in Cimahi; the Cireundeu Traditional Village. The Village is located in Cimahi Regional Level II area. Precisely in the valley of Gajahlangu

Hill with an altitude of 600-700 meter above sea level. Administratively, the village is part of the Leuwi Gajah sub-district, South Cimahi District, West Java Province. The village is an area that only consisted of one *Rukun Warga* (RW) so that the existing organization is limited in scope.

Usually, in a traditional village, there are traditional buildings. In Kampung Naga, which has characteristic traditional buildings, the roofs are made of dried thatch leaves, and the walls of the houses are made of woven bamboo, naturally colored or left in their original color (Maharlika & Fatimah, 2019). The traditional buildings in Cikondang Village feature a stage or "leuit," which functions as a place to gather, receive guests, or relax. Additionally, traditional buildings used as gathering places for residents, such as the 'bale,' have functional aspects and symbolic meanings. As written by Ashadi, the purpose of architecture is not just to provide shelter but also to declare status, convey information, provide a setting for certain activities, display and support cosmological beliefs, establish personal or group identity, and associate value systems (Ashadi, 2018). In the Cireundeu traditional village, there is a unique and distinctive traditional building called 'Bale Sarasehan,' a semi-modern bale-like structure. This cannot be separated

from the existence of a landfill around Cireundeu, which experienced a tragedy in 2005.

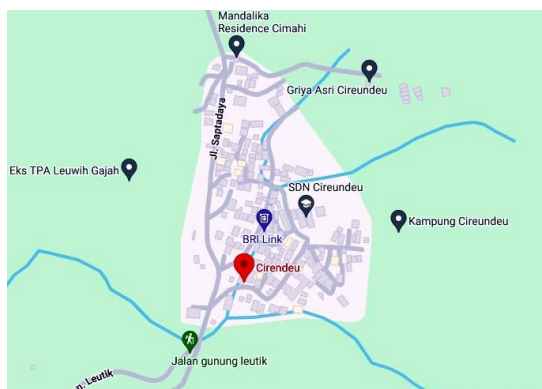


Figure 1. Location of Cireundeu village
Source: Google Maps (2024)

There was an explosion at the landfill caused by the accumulation of methane gas in the mountains of garbage, resulting in widespread scattering of waste. This directly affected the Cireundeu community, leading to a gradual change from traditional stilt houses to modern permanent houses due to the increased presence of flies from the scattered garbage.

Based on this background, the idea for the research title was conceived: The Role of Bale Sarasehan in the Maintenance and Preservation of Local Cultural Identity in Cireundeu Traditional Village. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the role of Bale Sarasehan, which can contribute to the sustainability of maintaining and preserving local cultural identity in Cireundeu Traditional Village.

Based on the above discussion, there are 2 research question emerged;

1. How does the design and architecture of the Bale Sarasehan building in Cireundeu Traditional Village reflect the values and beliefs of the local community, and how are these symbolic meanings integrated into its functional aspects?
2. What measures can be implemented to ensure the long-term sustainability of Bale Sarasehan and other traditional buildings in Cireundeu Village, considering their role in preserving local wisdom and cultural identity within the context of Indonesia's cultural heritage?

METHODS

This research was conducted in Cireundeu Traditional Village, South Cimahi Subdistrict, Cimahi City, West Java Province, and the researcher used the limited field research method. The limited field research method, which is

characterised by the ability to go directly to the centre of the target community, provides an interesting solution to eliminate the limitations of research caused by the use of other methods. On the other hand, according to Neuman (2003), field researchers are able to "think while standing". This means that the researcher as a research instrument has to react with quick thinking in the face of uncertain events in the field. This method produces descriptive data in the form of people's written or spoken words and observed behaviour (Nasution, 1992). The fieldwork in this study was carried out on a particular day, only on Saturday where the researchers stay all day at the location. The activities carried out are observing activities and participating in local community activities as well as unstructured interviews with local residents; people of Cireundeu. In addition, Kang Jajat was used as an informant or -according to Newman (2003)- a gate keeper to provide an overview of the atmosphere of activities that took place other than on Saturdays due to the limitations of the research. Kang Jajat provides the informations through photos and videos. This research is descriptive, which is a study that intends to provide a description of certain social phenomena, although there is already information about social phenomena as intended in the research problem, it is considered insufficient.

These are the steps of data collection that were followed to conduct this research. First; the observation, where the researchers interacted with the community on specific days. This approach allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the life and practices of the indigenous villages. Next, an unstructured interview was conducted with a prominent figure, *Kang Jajat*, who served as a guest reception in Cireundeu. The documentation technique was also used, in which the researchers recorded the interviews with the sources and captured images in the form of several photos and videos during the research. In addition, the researchers collected data through literature studies, including both printed literature and electronic literature (Internet).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Function Aspect

In accordance with its name, Bale Sarasehan, the term 'Bale' in Sundanese language means a kind of bench where villagers sit while chatting with fellow neighbors (Yunus, 1984). While in the book Sundanese Architecture, the term 'bale' means house (Salura, 2015). In the orientation of Sundanese life, the existence of bale is one of the elements of social containers. Generally, a traditional village in West

Java has a facility for gathering for its citizens such as a meeting hall of *bale patemon*; a traditional building found also in various parts of Indonesia, especially in Java. The term "Bale Patemon" can be broken down into "Bale," meaning a pavilion or meeting hall, and "Patemon," meaning a meeting or gathering (Siregar, Nurhaini, Husaini & Efendi, 2023). Thus, Bale Patemon refers to a pavilion used for gatherings, meetings, or communal activities.

So the bale is a place of social interaction for residents, including when receiving guests. Typologically, a bale has a square or rectangular building plan.

The term "sarasehan" in Sundanese means a meeting place or discussion. This word comes from the root word "sareseh" which means to discuss or talk with the aim of gaining a common understanding or reaching an agreement. Therefore, in the context of Bale Sarasehan, the term refers to a building or space where meetings, discussions or deliberations are held in the Sundanese cultural tradition (Yulianti & Suryadi, 2010).



Figure 2. Façade of Bale Sarasehan

When the research team came to Bale Sarasehan, there were no benches or chairs in the room. Every community or visitor who comes or does gathering activities in the main room (patengahan) is always done by sitting on the floor.

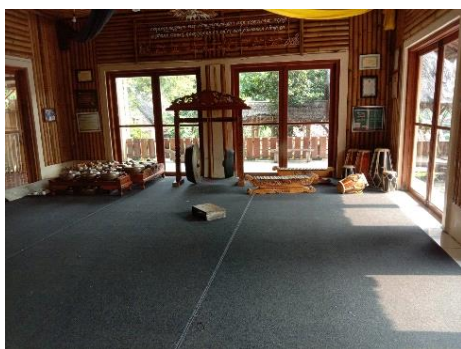


Figure 3. Interior of Bale Sarasehan

This turns out to have a meaning, namely sitting on the floor shows the democratic nature of the community, there are no differences in caste but all are equal. That is one of the characteristics of

Sundanese society that does not recognize differences in social levels.

When the research team conducted the limited field study at Bale Sarasehan on Saturday, it coincided with the routine jaipongan dance practice at 11am. The jaipongan dance rehearsal was attended by an average of 8 to 12 women with an age range of elementary to junior high school as shown in the picture below.

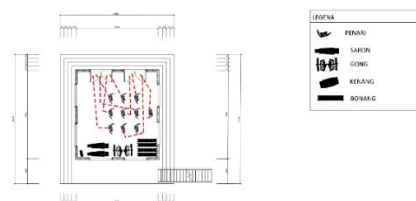


Figure 4. Jaipongan activity pattern

In addition, the research team found community activities practicing gamelan music in the evening. The activity is followed by male and female communities, which on average is played by 6 people and one coach, this time the coach is Kang Rey. The gamelan instruments played include saron, bonang, gong, and kendang.



Figure 5. Gamelan practicing activity pattern

Outside the time the research team conducted the limited field study, according to Kang Jajat's source as an informant of the research team, there is an activity, a major religious ritual that is often carried out at Bale Sarasehan every year by the people of Cireundeu Village, namely the commemoration of the New Year 1 Sura (Figure 4). This ritual is the Eid of the believers which is held as a ceremony of nutup taun (closing the year) and ngemban taun (welcoming the new year) Saka in Sundanese calendar. In this ceremony, there is a series of

rituals in which there is ritual communication both through stages and the interpretation of symbols. This activity is a local wisdom that has taken root in the Cirendeuh Traditional Village community for decades.



Figure 6. Religious ritual
Source: limawaktu.id (2023)

Aesthetic Aspects

The definition of aesthetics below is adapted to the content, meaning and breath of cultural traditions of local communities in Indonesia, in this case Sundanese culture. The Sundanese *buhun* (old) society recognizes the principle of the unity of three called *Tritangtu*. This principle underlies various aspects of Sundanese life. The *Tritangtu* principle also applies to the planning and arrangement of places where it is implied in *tata lampah*, *tata wayah*, and *tata wilayah*.

In traditional buildings there is also a division of Sundanese cosmology consisting of three parts of the world, namely the Upper World (*buana nyungcung / Nagara Suci*), the Lower World (*buana larang / dunia handap*), and the Middle World (*buana panca tengah*). The Upper World is ruled by *Ambu Luhur*, while the Lower World is ruled by *Ambu Handap* (Ruler of the Earth). And the Middle World or 'The Place of Human Life' is ruled by *Ambu Tengah* (Ruler of the Middle World) (Harun, 2011).

Meanwhile, Jakob Sumardjo in his book *Estetika Paradoks*, states that in the farming community, *Pola Tiga* generally applies. In general, Sundanese people are known as farmers. This pattern is a development of Pattern Two which recognizes the existence of the Middle World (third entity) as a unifier between the Upper and Lower Worlds. The Upper World is the sky while the Lower World is the earth. The marriage of the two will create a third entity, namely life on earth (Sumardjo, 2010). The sky is interpreted as wet in nature (female symbol), while the earth is dry (male symbol). Both are separate and distant and will bring death. For this reason, it must be ended by marriage so that there will be life or harmony from two conflicting entities. Middle-earth becomes the link, the

intermediary that bridges the two entities. This is also what distinguishes Pattern Two and Pattern Three. Pattern Two is more about death, but on the contrary, Pattern Three emphasizes life.

The Three Pattern is also applied to the Bale Sarasehan building. If the building is viewed vertically, the *Tritangtu* principle will also be reflected. At the bottom there is a staircase that symbolizes the Underworld (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Building foundation

Then at the very top is a roof that is given a ridge or *wuwungan* (Figure 8). The ridge or *wuwungan* is the top of the roof of a traditional house which functions as a cover on the roof of the house so that no rainwater or dust enters through the roof. Sometimes the ridge is decorated at the edges and also the center of the ridge. Bale Sarasehan's ridge is decorated at the ends in the shape of a horn that curves upwards. While in the center (*pancer*) there are decorations pointing upwards in the form of a small tower, the higher it goes, the smaller the shape. This shape symbolizes the existence of God Almighty. It also reminds us that humans are God's creation. While the straight shape of the bale roof means that the indigenous people have one goal to God. This is related to the openness to religion or beliefs that the Cireundeuh indigenous people believe in. Believing that difference is a beauty and is a gift from the Almighty.

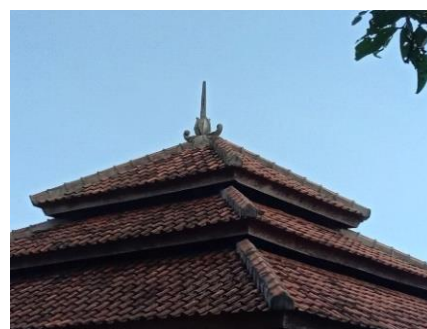


Figure 8. Building top

The meeting of the roof, symbol of the upper world, with the lower stairs, symbol of the lower world, takes place in the main room (*patengahan*), symbol of the middle world. *Patengahan* is the main room where people gather. Symbolically, the middle room as the Middle World is the life or marriage between the sacred Upper World and the profane Lower World. For people who follow the Three

Patterns, they prioritise life over death, so there needs to be an 'intermediary', in this case the role of the Middle World.



Figure 9. The building structure is divided into three parts

In this room there are four different fabrics, each color has a meaning that represents the elements of the earth. Black color means earth, yellow color means wind, white color means water, and red color means fire (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Color fabric inside

When viewed from the building plan (Figure 11), it has a rectangular shape. The basic rectangular shape found in this center room means "hirup kudu masagi," which translates to "life must be like pasagi" (square), expressing advice that life must be versatile. Another form, "jelema masagi" (Natawisastra, 1979), refers to a person who has many abilities and no shortcomings. Additionally, the square is a symbol of behavioral perfection. A square, with its equal sides, philosophically signifies that life must be balanced and wise.

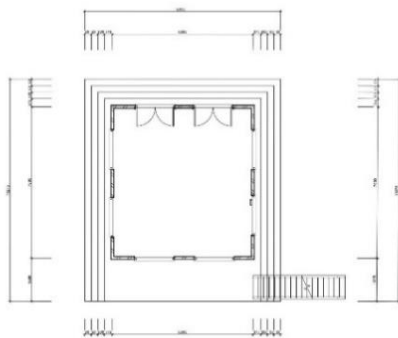


Figure 11. Building rectangular plan

CONCLUSION

In the Bale Sarasehan building, not only functional aspects are taken into account, but also symbolic meanings that are in line with the teachings and beliefs of the local community. The form, technique and elements of the building are designed to meet

practical needs while conveying values considered important by the Cireundeu community.

By understanding the role and values of the presence of Bale Sarasehan, steps can be taken to ensure the sustainability of the maintenance and preservation of local wisdom as a local cultural identity in the Cireundeu Traditional Village. In addition, the preservation of traditional villages as a whole is also important for the preservation of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

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