

Representation of Ecological Wisdom in Banyumas Folklore: An Ecocritical Study

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Abstract—Folklore actually represents a society's civilization, including how to manage and preserve the environment. Folklore, for example, can be a valuable resource for humans involved in efforts to save the environment. This study investigates the Banyumas indigenous people's local wisdom in terms of environmental preservation as found in Banyumas folklores. The ecological wisdom of the Banyumas community is a term used in this study to refer to folklore from Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia, that contains the value of local wisdom in terms of environmental conservation. This study took an ecocritical approach to folklore texts as a type of literary work. The data for this study came from Banyumas folklore, and the research method was qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that Banyumas folklore describes the Banyumas community's ecological wisdom in environmental conservation activities. These wisdoms include: respect for nature, living in harmony with nature, wisely using natural resources, using ecological knowledge for toponymy, and using nature as a spiritual tool. Readers can use these wisdom values as a guide to optimize environmental conservation.

Index Terms—Banyumas, ecological wisdom, folklore, ecocritic

I. INTRODUCTION

The environment is one of the most serious problems confronting humanity this century (O'Connor et al., 2020; Tregidga & Laine, 2022). This issue has affected a number of countries, including Indonesia (Pirmana et al., 2021), Thailand (Mostafanezhad & Evrard, 2021), India (Shah & Narain, 2019), and Malaysia (Salman et al., 2021), among others. These issues include a variety of environmental crises such as pollution, water crises, peatland fires, floods, and unwise resource exploitation.

Environmental issues are more than just technical issues. Environmental issues are moral issues, as well as perception and human behavior issues (Keraf, 2010; Varhar & Dwivedi, 2020). The most important goal is to shift people's perspectives so that they are more concerned with respecting and protecting the environment (Sumarwati et al., 2020). Folklore, for example, contains local knowledge that can be an important resource for humans in this era of rapid local and global environmental change (Barau et al., 2016; Dundes, 2007). Environmental issues discussed in literary works can serve as a medium for the reading community to gain ecological literacy about environmental conditions, causes of environmental damage, and solutions that can be chosen to protect and preserve the environment (Yulisetiani, 2020). Messages from folklore about ecological systems teach readers empathy for the fact that humans are an inseparable part of nature (Brown, 2013).

Several countries around the world have knowledge of local wisdom in environmental management and preservation passed down from generation to generation through folklore. The indigenous Wayuu people of Colombia's Gajira Peninsula have wisdom in managing marine and fisheries ecosystems with high biodiversity (Carillo & Ossa, 2021). The Ainu indigenous people of Japan are wise in farming, land management, and avoiding natural exploitation (Sari & Putra, 2020). The Indian community, which is the world's second largest rice producer, has the foresight to ferment a variety of rice-based foods (Ray et al., 2016). However, if local wisdom is not passed down to the next generation, cultural heritage is at risk of extinction. Meanwhile, local knowledge is critical in helping communities respond to climate change and environmental crises (Sumarwati, 2022).

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The people of Banyumas, Jawa Pengah, Indonesia, are one example of a group of people who have been fortunate enough to inherit folklore that conveys a great deal of local wisdom in terms of environmental preservation. Banyumas refers to four regencies in Central Java Province, namely Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, and Cilacap. The four regions share a cultural trait: they all speak the ngapak Javanese language (Taufiqurrohmah et al., 2017). There are many folklores with environmental themes in this area, particularly in Cilacap Regency. Banyumas folklore began as an oral tradition that grew and developed within the Banyumas community. Banyumas folklore contains traditional elements about the way of life, such as how to view nature, which develops naturally as part of that way of life (Setyaningsih et al., 2020).

The moral education message about environmental conservation in Banyumas folklore is relevant to today's environmental problems. Traditional knowledge systems, in particular, can be an important source of guidance for modern humans in their efforts to save the environment from crisis (Kakoty, 2018). Currently, more young people are abandoning traditional values, absorbing new values, and abandoning traditional wisdom values. The younger generation does not understand the transition process, and considers traditional culture, including folklore, to be out of date (Sumarwati et al., 2020).

Until now, researchers have not prioritized the study of Banyumas folklore, particularly from an environmental standpoint. The findings of a study titled Reconstruction of the Folklore of Djaka Mruyung in Banyumas Regency (Setiawanti, 2014) focused on the discussion of the reconstruction of the folklore of Djaka Mruyung, one of Banyumas' folklore. Cablaka: Strugglers of Honesty in Banyumasan Folklore and Its Importance as Educational Content (Febriani, 2018) is a study that discusses the importance of education in Banyumas folklore. Another study, Cultural Values in Baturaden Folklore in the Banyumas Community as an Alternative for Literature Teaching Materials in Elementary Schools (Umri & Syah, 2021), focuses on the cultural elements in Banyumas folklore. However, studies that look at the environmental wisdom represented in Banyumas folklore are still limited. This analysis discusses the form of environmental wisdom contained in Banyumas folklore.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to discover the forms of ecological wisdom of the Banyumas indigenous people in order to preserve nature as depicted in folklore texts. Ecological wisdom is a type of community wisdom that focuses on protecting and treating nature wisely in order to prevent environmental destruction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Ecocriticism*

Ecocriticism explores the ways in which humans imagine and describe the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production. It was inspired by, but also critical of, the modern environmental movement. Eco-criticism tracks the movement's development and explores the concepts that most occupy eco-criticism, including pollution problems, forest destruction problems, nature damage, housing problems, flora and fauna problems, and earth problems in general (Garrard, 2004).

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist literary criticism examines literature from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxist literary criticism brings awareness of forms of production and economic class to reading literary texts, ecocritical studies take an environment-centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty, 1996).

Ecocritical studies are seen as helpful in the study of folklore in order to investigate environmental aspects contained in folklore texts. The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment is known as ecocriticism (Glotfelty, 1996). Ecocriticism begins with the notion that humanities scholars can no longer ignore environmental studies, especially in light of the current environmental crisis (Indiriyanto, 2020). Ecocriticism, as a literary study approach, transcends the duality between art and life, humans and nature, and strives to live a more sustainable life (Pamungkas et al., 2019).

The value of ecological knowledge extends beyond observing the harmony and stability of the environment to understanding human attitudes and behavior. Ecocritical studies are interdisciplinary, spanning literature, culture, philosophy, sociology, psychology, environmental history, politics, economics, and religious studies (Garrard, 2004). Ecocritical studies are useful for investigating culturally produced texts, such as folklore texts. The elements of the environment and human life's attitude toward nature can be well known using this approach.

B. *Ecological Wisdom*

The term *ecosophy*, a synonym for ecological wisdom or the wisdom of place, was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973. The term *ecosophy* is intended as a new name for human attitudes towards nature. The use of *ecosophy* and relevant deep ecological constructs as a paradigm is intended to go beyond the general concerns of environmental protection and erode the gap between humans and nature, as well as between the spiritual and the physical (Liao & Chan, 2016).

According to Yang and Young (2019), ecological wisdom is an action carried out by humans unintentionally from within themselves with the aim of realizing concern for the environment and utilizing a safe and harmonious environment in serving basic human needs for survival and development. This is a fundamental and arguably essential

practice that humans have. Humans have lived side by side for thousands of years with nature. Nature is managed and utilized by humans from generation to generation. Nature supports humans, and humans support themselves through the preservation of nature.

Ecological wisdom is a subset of local wisdom that focuses on living in harmony with nature while avoiding environmental harm (Holilah, 2015; Jualeha et al., 2019). Ecological wisdom promotes wisdom values such as respect for nature, responsibility, compassion, and concern for nature, as well as a desire to live simply and in harmony with nature (Keraf, 2010).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study falls under the purview of qualitative research employing descriptive methods. According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), qualitative research is defined as research that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and behaviors that can be observed. A descriptive method is a problem-solving procedure that describes the state of the subject or object of research based on the facts that appear or are as they are. The following Banyumas folklores were used in this study: (1) Kadipaten Penyarang [Duchy of Penyarang], (2) Nusakambangan, (3) Kerajaan Nusatembini [Kingdom of Nusatembini], (4) Bunga Wijayakusuma [Wijayakusuma Flower], (5) Sepatnunggal, (6) Legenda Gunung Jambu [The Legend of Mount Jambu], (7) Asal-usul Gunung Srandil [Origins of Mount Srandil], (8) Rawa Baya, (9) Gunung Mruyung, and (10) Legenda Waduk Naga Wangsa [The Legend of Naga Wangsa Reservoir]. The ten folklores were published in the folklore anthology *Folklore: Cilacap Regency in 2017* by the Central Java Language Center, Language Development and Development Agency, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. The information in this study is in the form of information related to the Banyumas community's ecological wisdom. Data were gathered through extensive reading, analysis, and documentation of findings. Based on the framework of ecocritical theory, data were analyzed using a content analysis method. This study's validity is based on the triangulation of sources and data. According to Creswell (2018, p. 285), validity in qualitative research is an attempt to ensure the accuracy of research results through the use of specific procedures.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Banyumas folklore narratives reflect ecological wisdom in managing and conserving nature, such as respecting nature, living in harmony with nature, wisely utilizing natural resources, utilizing ecological knowledge for toponyms, and making nature a spiritual means.

A. *Respecting Nature*

The Banyumas people have their own way of respecting nature. This is usually accomplished through various forms of prohibition. Prohibition is directed from parents to their children or children who are younger. The prohibitions include the prohibitions of indiscriminately catching fish, indiscriminately cutting down trees, and littering. The Banyumas people believe that breaking the taboo will have a negative impact on the perpetrators. Furthermore, religious ritual activities such as giving alms to the earth can be used to demonstrate respect for nature. These attitudes are part of *memayu hayuning bawana*'s philosophy. The Banyumas folklore contains forms of wisdom based on respect for nature. This is exemplified by the following data from Sepatnunggal folklore:

"My son, Panembahan Dalem Reksapati. Know that the sepat fish is the only fish in the Cibengkeng River. It is strictly prohibited for anyone to catch, move, or kill and eat it. Know that the life of the sepat fish means survival in Babakan Village, Leuweung Wates, and Padontilu Springs. The existence of fish represents the village's future. The death of this fish means disaster for the village," Ki Wangsakarta explained, looking down languidly. (Kurnianto et al., 2017, p. 88)

The folklore titled *Sepatnunggal*, *Kadipaten Penyarang* [Duchy of Penyarang], and *Asal-usul Dusun Mertangga* [Origins of Mertangga Hamlet] suggests an ecological message of respect for nature. Nature is respected in different ways in the three folklore contexts. Respect for nature is demonstrated in the *Sepatnunggal* story through the message of wisdom granting the right to life to other creatures. Residents of the community are forbidden from catching the only sepat fish in the Cibengkeng River. If the prohibition is broken, the community around the Cibengkeng River, as well as the residents of Babakan Village in general, will suffer. Ratna Kencana's character in the story was severely chastised by her father, Ki Wangsakarta. As a result, Ki Wangsakarta's words have been proven. Nature was furious with the residents of the Cibengkeng River not long after the large sepat fish was eaten and only the bones remained. Because of the violation of the prohibition, there was lightning, strong winds, and fallen trees. No one in Babakan Village has dared to catch fish in the Cibengkeng River since the incident for fear of disaster.

Respect for nature is demonstrated in *Kadipaten Penyarang* [Duchy of Penyarang] folklore by refraining from indiscriminately cutting down trees. Keeping the forest's trees alive is an expression of respect for nature. Before the establishment of a small kingdom, the area of Serangan was said to be densely forested. Large trees, various birds, and other animals have survived. The name hutan Penyayangan is intriguing because it conveys the message that humans should love all living things. The subsequent establishment of the kingdom should not disrupt the existing natural order. Ranggasena's character is unconcerned about the existence of the forest and does not want to cut down trees carelessly for fear of disturbing the forest dwellers' living creatures.

There is a different way of respecting nature in the Asal-usul Dusun Mertangga [Origins of Mertangga Hamlet] folklore. This respect is demonstrated by the earth alms ritual. Alms of the earth are public expressions of gratitude for the abundance of the earth's produce. This gratitude is part of a prayer that nature will continue to bless us through its produce in the coming years. Every year, harvesting parties and communal meals are held to express gratitude.

B. *Living in Harmony With Nature*

Humans are an inextricably linked part of nature. This requires human cooperation with nature. Nature will not be friendly with humans if humans do not want to be friendly with it. Banyumas traditional society is a group of people who enjoy being in harmony with nature. Living in harmony with nature does not imply destroying it. As reflected in the principle of *memayu hayuning bawana*, living in harmony with nature becomes a foothold. This attitude is reflected in Banyumas folklore such as Rawa Baya, Gunung Maruyung [Mount Maruyung], and Kerajaan Nusatembini [Kingdom of Nusatembini].

Rawa Baya, Gunung Maruyung [Mount Maruyung], and Kerajaan Nusatembini [Kingdom of Nusatembini] folklore all hint at a message of ecological wisdom about living in harmony with nature. Humans can be both friends and foes of nature. Banyumas residents prefer to coexist with nature. The ultimate goal of this attitude is to bring harmony into one's life. If humans want to be friendly with nature, nature will eventually be friendly with humans as well. The forms of wisdom live in harmony with nature, as evidenced by the following data from Rawa Baya folklore:

Don't be afraid, humans! We, like you, don't want to be bothered or bother you. However, if you humans disturb our peace, we will naturally be disturbed. If we feel threatened, don't be surprised if we attack. In fact, victims may exist. You happen to be passing through our area or palace. We crocodiles would like to invite you to live in peace and respect each other's territory, particularly in the swamp and Kedung Jero. (Kurnianto et al., 2017, pp. 153-154)

In general, the attitudes of living in harmony with nature in Rawa Baya and Gunung Maruyung [Mount Maruyung] folklore are similar. The story of Mak Romlah's friendship with the monkeys that guard Mount Maruyung is told in Gunung Maruyung [Mount Maruyung] folklore. Mak Romlah is said to be friends with all forest monkeys, as well as other wild animals. Similarly, there is a message in the Rawa Baya folklore to make friends with crocodiles. It is said that crocodiles have lived in a swamp for a long time. Kartanom is described in the story as the first figure to persuade the residents that the white crocodile that lives in the swamp is not dangerous. The swamp crocodiles will not bother humans as long as they are not disturbed or injured. This realization finally raises awareness among the residents of Mount Maruyung and Rawa Baya that they consider animals to be human friends, and that both should not disturb each other.

The Kerajaan Nusatembini [Kingdom of Nusatembini] folklore conveys a different message about living in harmony with nature. The story of the magic of the original bamboo clump introduces the people of Banyumas to the kingdom of Nusatembini. The kingdom is surrounded by *baloewanti pring ori pitung sap* (seven-layered ori bamboo clumps) and is led by a woman named Ratu Brantarara. For work, the kingdom constructs a seven-layered bamboo clump fence. Aside from security, bamboo fences serve as a form of harmony between humans and nature.

C. *Using Natural Resources Wisely*

The people of Banyumas have a wise approach to life in terms of managing and utilizing natural resources. The key to life's harmony makes them wiser in their use of natural resources. This attitude is reflected, at the very least, in the *Kadipaten Penyarang* [Duchy of Penyarang], *Gunung Maruyung* [Mount Maruyung], and *Legenda Waduk Naga Wangsa* [The Legend of Naga Wangsa Reservoir] folklores. In general, the three folklores teach humans to take advantage of natural products without being greedy, to avoid destroying nature, and to ensure sustainability. Data from the folklore of the Legend of the Naga Wangsa Reservoir, which is quoted below, can be used to observe various forms of wisdom in the use of natural resources wisely.

The snake replied, "I'm sorry, sir. Actually, I am Samun who has lied to all of you. I didn't throw the egg away, sir. I cooked and ate all the eggs. Because it tastes so good, I don't share it with you according to the agreement with Samin. Because of my greed I turned into a snake". (Kurnianto et al., 2017, pp. 208-209)

Ranggasena, a character in the *Kadipaten Penyarang* [Duchy of Penyarang] folklore, constructs a tree house out of wood and leaves. Ranggasena's goal is to construct the tree house so that the dense forest is not cut down. As a result, the animals that live in the trees are not bothered. Ranggasena's attitude demonstrates ecological wisdom in the wise use of natural resources. Ranggasena is a figure who teaches people not to destroy nature. Similarly, in the Gunung Maruyung [Mount Maruyung] folklore, the character Mak Romlah creates a bamboo fan by weaving bamboo into *hihid* (bamboo fan). Mak Romlah's action in making bamboo fans is an example of wisely utilizing natural products because bamboo fans are environmentally friendly. Bamboo is used in the manufacture of household appliances.

The *Legenda Waduk Naga Wangsa* [The Legend of Naga Wangsa Reservoir] folklore tells of the wise use of natural resources through tragic wisdom. Samun, the main character, once discovered an egg in a forest near a Naga Wangsa Reservoir. Samun wanted to eat the eggs he found on his own because of his greedy nature. Previously, his brother and father had been advised not to be greedy by taking eggs carelessly. Samun, on the other hand, secretly cooked and ate the egg alone due to his greedy nature. As a result of this, Samun was cursed and transformed into a dragon. The incident on Samun demonstrated that humans must be able to manage natural resources wisely and not become greedy.

Greedy people have a negative impact on humans.

D. Leveraging Ecological Knowledge for Toponymy

The Banyumas people are known to have a high regard for nature. This is because the people of Banyumas recognize the importance of nature in the overall sustainability of life. Nature conservation has even become a way of life for the Banyumas. The Banyumas, for example, use place names that incorporate natural elements such as water, plants, and animals. Data from the *Kadipaten Penyarang* [Duchy of Penyarang] folklore, which is quoted below, can be used to observe the forms of wisdom that use ecological knowledge for toponymy.

Adipati Ranggasena named each area traversed by the road *ci*, such as Cipari, Cikangleles, Cikalong, Chinesengsi, Cibenda, and Ciloning. *Ci* is an abbreviation for 'water source.' The title *ci* is used to ensure that the area named with that word never runs out of water. (Kurnianto et al., 2017, p. 14)

The names of places in the Banyumas community each have their own meaning and history. Usually, the people of Banyumas name places for their own reasons. There are numerous place names that incorporate environmental elements. This is similar to Nusakambangan folklore, which takes the name of a location with a plant element. Nusakambangan is derived from two words: *nusa*, which means island, and *kambangan*, which means development (where many flowers grow). When combined, the two words mean a place with many flowers.

The naming of places in folklore known as *Rawa Baya* incorporates elements of the crocodile animal. As the name implies, there are many crocodiles in this swamp, which is known as *Kedung Jero*. The naming of places after animals indicates that the Banyumas people have ecological knowledge of crocodiles. Then, in the folklore of *Kadipaten Penyarang* [Duchy of Penyarang], the Banyumas people use an element of the word *ci*, which means water source. The naming has a philosophy as a prayer to ensure that the area always has an abundance of water.

E. Making Nature a Spiritual Tool

The elements that make up life on Earth are a gift from God. The people of Banyumas believe that humans should be grateful for the wealth on Earth. The Banyumas people believe that nature can help them get closer to God. Natural elements such as water, mountains, caves, and flowers, according to the Banyumas, contain spiritual powers emitted by God. Forms of wisdom transform nature into a spiritual medium, as evidenced by the following data from the *Legenda Gunung Jambu* [The Legend of Mount Jambu] folklore:

Sokra went to the king after thoroughly examining the empress and reporting the results of his examination. Sokra claims that the empress's illness is not typical. There will never be a cure other than water provided by nature, specifically eternal water located on the banks of the Citanduy River to the east of West Java. (Kurnianto et al., 2017, p. 105)

Water serves an important spiritual function for the Banyumas people in the *Legenda Gunung Jambu* [The Legend of Mount Jambu] folklore. Water is used to meet both external and internal needs. *Lembu Andini*, the consort of the *Pasir Loka* Kingdom, is said to have suffered from an unusual illness. Only *Mount Guava's* eternal water can cure the disease. Until, finally, the empress recovered thanks to *Mount Guava's* eternal water. This conveys the message that water is essential to human survival. Water can be used to treat diseases.

Asal-usul Gunung Srandil [Origins of Mount Srandil] and *Bunga Wijayakusuma* [Wijayakusuma Flower] folklores hint at a message about the spiritual function of caves and flowers. Caves and flowers are used to draw closer to God. Caves, such as the *Srandil* cave in the story of *Mount Srandil's* origin, are popular places of meditation for Banyumas residents. Many people pray in that cave for the ease and glory of life. Meanwhile, *Bunga Wijayakusuma* [Wijayakusuma Flower] serves a similar spiritual purpose. To become kings, royal families in Java must be able to pick the *Bunga Wijayakusuma* [Wijayakusuma Flower] when it is in bloom. According to the local legend, this flower can only be found on *Nusakambangan* Island.

V. CONCLUSION

When it comes to environmental sustainability, the people of Banyumas have an interesting point of view. The Banyumas people are wise when it comes to nature. Banyumas folklores reflect these wise attitudes. The Banyumas have a spiritual concept known as "*Memayu Hayuning Bawana*," which means "keeping a harmonious relationship between God, humans, and the universe." The concept of *memayu hayuning bawana* is a philosophy that includes a comprehensive character dimension as well as a spiritual philosophy in keeping natural resource management laws in harmony.

The ten Banyumas folklores examined in this study are environmental folklore. Banyumas folklores contain numerous environmental preservation messages. Many natural elements, both biotic and abiotic, are mentioned in Banyumas folklore. These natural elements not only serve as the story's background, but also as the story's theme, conveying an ecological message to the reader. This ecological wisdom is reflected in activities that reflect appreciation for nature, such as respecting nature, living in harmony with nature, wisely utilizing natural resources, using ecological knowledge for toponyms, and using nature as a spiritual tool. This study demonstrates that Banyumas folklores can be used as a medium for ecological literacy in environmental conservation campaigns.

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