

# The Philosophy of Human Life in the Lexicon of the Laesan Traditional Art song in Lasem Rembang

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**Abstract.** This study aims to examine the philosophical issues in human life contained in the lexicon of laesan art songs. It used a qualitative descriptive approach with an ethnographic study of communication. The data was fragments of speech and actions involved in the laesan performance. The research method was ethnographic and participatory. The results point out that laesan portrays a philosophy of human life from birth to death. Moreover, humans are described as servants who must obey and rely all hopes only on God. Guidance for living in the world is reflected in the songs Ela-elo, Uculana Bandan, Kembang Gedhang, Lurua Laesan, and Lara Tangis. Ela-elo describes humans being born on earth because God's will created humans, Uculana Bandan depicts humans facing problems in the world, and Kembang Gedhang illustrates that humans only live temporarily in the world in the sense that all of them will meet their end one day. In addition, Lurua Laesan contains philosophy that humans must always try, not just give up, and Lara Tangis depicts the pain of humans when they are about to die.

## 1 Introduction

Various socio-cultural phenomena covered with story in society can be understood as folklore (oral literature). Sims [1] explains that folklore grows in many forms of informal communication, for instance, in oral or written stories habits (behavior, traditional ceremonies), and objects. They can be specifically songs, traditions, norms, and legends. Folklore, in the form of art, is an oral tradition passed down from generation to generation and is a fairly important means of describing the way of thinking of a community, typically through language.

According to Koentjaraningrat [2], language is a medium to express habits in society and to reveal knowledge from their social behavior. This way, language can also be a reflection of the way people think about something. Various events can be observed from the cultural heritage of their ancestors such as relics from their predecessors in the form of traditional dances, folk songs, and others. This has benefits for improving characteristics in the behavior of today's society. Language describes the characteristics of a particular ethnicity. This means

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that its characteristics that exist in a particular community will show an assessment of the traditions that grow and develop there. The same thing goes on in the Lasem community.

Lasem is an area in Rembang Regency, Central Java Province, which has a high value of cultural heritage, one of which is Laesan. Laesan is a traditional art performance that is presented with typical songs accompanied by *jun* and *bumbung*. The existence of these Javanese songs represents good advice for human life. The song titles that will be described in this study are *Ela-Elo*, *Uculna Bandan*, *Lurua Laesan*, and *Lara Tangis*.

The preceding songs contain philosophical messages, deeply reflecting human life both literally and symbolically, implying local wisdom in the Lasem community. They are some of many traditional heritages that are of great benefit to civilization in today's society. However, the existence of these Javanese songs can be stated as an isolated tradition along with the lack of interest in laesan by today's generation. The rapid development of science and technology really affects the community, especially young people who tend to prefer foreign products compared to local ones, including in songs. Simply, folk songs are less desired these days. This happens because the individual will feel cooler if he loves a song written in a foreign language. This incident inevitably made the folk songs marginalized. This is an irony, since Javanese songs, typically performed in laesan, contain noble values about life—passed down from ancestors to the next generations.

Based on the phenomena described above, there are two things that will be discussed in this study, namely 1) what lexicon is in the lyrics of Javanese songs in laesan that describe local wisdom, and 2) what philosophy is contained in it.

## 2 Methodology

This study used descriptive qualitative method with the following stages: data collection, data analysis, and drawing conclusions. Data collection was done through observation and interview techniques. Observations were held at Soditan Village, while free interviews were carried out directly with resource persons. The two respective criteria for resource persons were: 1) the head of Laesan group in Lasem, and 2) sixty years old (or more) laesan figure. Data collection was also carried out through library observations by using books and the internet.

In the data analysis stage, the referential equivalent method was used. According to Sudaryanto, this method is in which the determining tool is independent (not part of the related language). The data were in the form of all utterances involved in laesan art performances in Soditan Village, Lasem Sub-district, Rembang Regency. Meanwhile, the data sources were all the players consisting of laes, handlers, singer, and musicians. This qualitative descriptive research utilized an ethnographic communication approach to reveal the communicative messages contained in laesan. The last step was data interpretation. At this stage, conclusions were drawn.

## 3 Results and Discussion

The Javanese songs played in laesan are found containing various values, typically about human life and local wisdom. There are good advices for human from birth to death.

### 3.1 Opening Song

*Lailahaillallah Muhammadurrasulullah*  
*Pengerane nggawe laes*  
(**Ela-Elo**)

This song *Ela-Elo* describes the guidance to living life from birth. The previous lyrics were once *la ilolah, mukamad ar rosulalah*. It reminds people to do everything in the name of Allah. According to the interviews, this lyric is actually a recitation of *tauhid*, namely *La Ilaha Illallah Muhammad ar rasulullah*. The sentence means there is no god but Allah, and Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. In Islamic belief, this statement is a very sacred and is a form of one's faith in its creator.

According to the Javanese in Lasem, the lyrics contain a call and a reminder to humans that in living life, one must always hold fast to Allah's commands and stay away from everything that Allah forbids, as well as in determining steps in the world based on guidelines and principles following the Prophet Muhammad S.a.w. In addition, the lyrics of *pengerane nggawe laes* hold the meaning that it is God who wills and makes humans live. Therefore, people must always do good deeds in the world because human birth is absolutely God's will. Humans are *khalifah fil ardhi* (leader in the earth) which means they are representatives of God. This way, people must always establish good relationship with God, fellow humans, and other creatures.

### 3.2 Core Song

*Uculna Banda nira iki sari laes  
dunung Allah dunung  
Sapa sing iso nguculi bahu kiwa  
kejaba pangeran ira sari laes  
(Uculna Bandan)*

The song *Uculna Bandan* is sung after the opening round in laesan. If *Ela-Elo* is a representation of advice for humans when they are just born in the world, then *Uculna Bandan* depicts advice for humans in the midst of their lives. People will face various trials, obstacles, and sadness. However, all must be faced firmly by following God's guidance.

The first and second lyrics have an attachment meaning that only God who can free all worldly shackles that bind humans. So humans need to beg and pray in the face of trials, both regarding difficulties and pleasure they experience. Meanwhile, the third and fourth lyrics are in line, saying that only Allah who can help humans in poverty. Only God Almighty deserves to be used as human support—nothing else. This song has a message of warning and reminder for humans in this world.

In addition to praying, humans are also obliged to try their best. This is reflected in the lyrics of a song entitled *Lurua Laesan*.

*Lurua laesan  
Laesane widodari  
(Lurua Laesan)*

There are two lyrics sung repeatedly in the first line, meaning that humans are obliged to try and struggle, not just pray. Meanwhile, the second line expresses that humans have the nature of goodness, which in this case interpreted with the lexicon '*widodari*' (angel). Humans are given capabilities so that they must try their best to reach or get something. For example, when one is stricken with illness, the he has to be willing to look for medicine, which is reflected in the song *Kembang Gedhang*.

*Mbang-kembang gedhang  
Sing diglandhang dadi laesan  
(Kembang Gedhang)*

This Javanese song is a *parikan* (pantun/verse) type which has a philosophical meaning that this life goes on and on. There are ups and downs, depending on God's will for us. Therefore, humans are obliged to surrender to God and cannot deny God's decree as stated in the second line of the song *Kembang Gedhang*, namely *Sing diglandhang dadi laesan*. Things chosen by God will happen no matter what.

### 3.3 Closing Song

*Lara tangis kelayung-layung*  
*Larane wong wedi mati*  
*Sapa bisa ngelingna*  
*Kejaba pengeran sira*  
**(Lara Tangis)**

The song entitled *Lara Tangis* implies that humans are in great pain when facing death at the end of their lives. Therefore, the first lyric *lara tangis kelayung-layung* means that the pain during death is inevitable and horrible. It is deeply illustrated in the second lyric, namely *larane wong wedi mati*. In general, people are so scared of death that they cannot even imagine the pain. The third and fourth lyrics contain the meaning that no one can help humans towards the path of truth at the end of their lives except God Almighty.

## 4 Conclusion

In this study, it is found that the lexicons in the Laesan Song include the songs *Ela-Elo*, *Uculna Bandan*, *Lurua Laesan*, and *Lara Tangis*. All are local wisdom in Lasem and have philosophical meanings about human provisions in living their lives. These advices describe the human process from birth to death which is interpreted in each song session, namely in the opening, core, and closing. The opening song interprets human birth. The core song interprets humans' responsibilities to maintain good relations with God, fellow humans, and other creatures. The closing song depicts death that will be faced by all humans in this world. These typical Laesan songs are sung to the accompaniment of *jun* and *bumbung* instruments. These elements demonstrate the local wisdom that is still preserved in the Lasem community, implying a good relationship between humans and nature.

## References

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