



## Mantras in the Erau Tradition in Kutai Kartanegara

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### Abstract:

*Traditions and mantras are essential elements in people's culture and life. This study focuses on mantras in the Erau tradition in Kutai Kartanegara Kingdom. Erau is one of Indonesia's cultural traditions, which is carried out annually with an activity center in Tenggarong, Kutai Kartanegara, East Kalimantan. In the Erau tradition, the mantras is vital in regulating society and determining social relations between citizens. It also acts as a source of inspiration and motivation for people to carry out their daily lives. This research was conducted to understand more about these mantras and how they are used in the context of the Erau tradition. This study also aims to discover the meanings of each mantra in the Erau tradition and how these mantras play a role in people's daily lives. The result of this study is that mantras is used as a local communication tool in the form of language, which has an essential role in seeding messages and culture. The characteristics of the mantra used are spoken language and the mention of all the supernatural beings believed to be the rulers of the supernatural realm. The meaning of the mantra is intended to seek permission from the rulers of the supernatural realm to hold the Erau event, to ensure the smooth conduct of the Kutai Kartanegara Erau activities, and to empower the king who leads his people simultaneously. The results of this study can be used as a reference in future studies on other traditions and mantras in different regions.*

**Keywords:** *community communication; cultural feasts; Erau tradition; King and society; mantras*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tradition and mantras are essential elements in the culture and life of society. Erau tradition is one of the Indonesian cultural traditions carried out yearly and is the center of activities in Tenggarong, Kutai Kartanegara, East Kalimantan (Soetoen, 1979). The tradition has essential values that guide society and help in character-building for the younger generation (Khuriyah et al., 2017). These values include cooperation between the kingdom, local government, and

society, as well as other values such as unity, cooperation, tolerance, social awareness, recognition of excellence, democracy, work ethics, and respect for culture. In the Erau tradition, mantras have an essential function and role in the Kutai Kartanegara kingdom. Mantras is an effective communication tool between the king and the community and a medium to spread important messages and information from the king to the community.

Erau begins with the *Merangin* traditional ceremony. The purpose is to invite supernatural beings to participate in the festivities of the Kutai Erau tradition. This ritual informs the supernatural beings residing on land and notifies the supernatural beings residing in water. The *Merangin* traditional ceremony is conducted to inform the supernatural beings that the Erau event will be held (Sakti, 2018).

Furthermore, *besawai* ceremony is held, led by a customary chief of Kutai. This ceremony is attended by distinguished invitees, particularly community leaders and state officials. The purpose is to inform the community, the nobility, and the leaders that the king will perform the Erau ceremony, and the committee of this ceremony is the traditional leaders of Kutai, namely *pelawiran*, *runtut asa*, and *peujung runtut purus*. They serve as a link or mediator between the Sultan and the Gods, granting the Sultan health and safety (Sundari et al., 2021). In a society that still has primordial values, it is difficult for them to forget mystical views on various socio-cultural phenomena in life because Erau has a special place in the lives of the Kutai people themselves, especially in the past and present (Janah, 2017).

Several researchers have conducted studies on societal culture. A study on the importance of the Erau tradition in shaping the character values of the younger generation (Khuriyah et al., 2017). It uncovers that the Erau tradition has essential values that can be used as a guide in character building and to minimize degradation and damaged values of national identity in the younger generation. Pebriani emphasizes the aspect of understanding the *betawar* tradition in relation to contemporary issues (Pebriani, 2023). The similarity between this research and Pebriani's research lies in the *betawar* tradition, while the difference lies in the focus of the research. Fatikah et al. provide a focal point for research on mantras in a historical context (Fatikah et al., 2019). The difference with this research is the difference in location and ethnicity, while the similarity is the use of the same surah in their research. In addition, there was also a study on researching the form and function of mantras ((Dawati et al., 2022).

Few studies have been done on the mantras in the Erau traditional ceremony. This study aims to understand more about the mantras and how they are used in the context of the Erau tradition. The results of this study are expected to provide new insights into the importance of mantras in local traditions and how they can be understood and appreciated by the wider community. In addition, the results of this study can also be used as a reference in further research on other traditions and mantras in different regions. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to increasing understanding and appreciation of local traditions and mantras and how they can benefit society and socio-economic development.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

The researchers applied ethnography and linguistics methods, or so-called ethnolinguistic study, to study cultural events within the scope of religion and power in the Erau ceremony procession

in Kutai Kartanegara. The study was conducted in a natural situation, so there are no limitations in interpreting or understanding the phenomena being studied. The selection of ethnography and language methods is appropriate to describe the reality, which is not based solely on the researcher's interpretation but from the ritual actors themselves or by "seeing reality from the perspective of the actors, namely the mental components in their minds who are members of a culture or society, who view themselves and the world from their perspective, based on the values, knowledge, and attitudes maintained in culture. Therefore, ethnography and language methods can give a mark to study scientifically because they describe the diversity of complex conceptual structures of cultural phenomena as they are and explore events or contexts represented in the narrative as situations that occur or are contextual which aim to describe culture holistically from the Erau procession which stores and hides cultural actors in carrying out actions that follow the values and norms in the ritual as cultural reality.

The research method involves a qualitative approach with an interpretive approach. The following are the steps of the procedure that were used:

1. Data collection: Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Erau tradition experts and other researchers with in-depth knowledge of the tradition. These interviews were conducted off-the-record to ensure respondents felt comfortable and free to speak.
2. Data analysis: The analysis process begins after the data is collected. This analysis involves interpreting the interview text and coding the data. The process was carried out using thematic analysis techniques.
3. Data validation: After data analysis, the data were validated by conducting additional interviews with the same respondents to ensure that the interpretations made were accurate and relevant.
4. Interpretation of Results: The results were interpreted and written as a research report after validation. This interpretation includes an understanding of the meaning and function of mantras in the Erau tradition, as well as how the mantras play a role in the daily lives of the community.

With this method, this research is expected to provide a deep understanding of the mantras in the Erau tradition and how these mantras play a role in the daily lives of the community.

## **2.2 Research Setting and Informants**

This research was conducted in Kutai Kartanegara or Tenggarong because there is an Erau ceremony that is always held together with the anniversary of the city of Tenggarong. The Erau ceremony is held annually and is very crowded. Erau is a ritual tradition and traditional Kutai Kartanegara Ing Martadipura Sultanate ceremony. Erau, which is held in Kutai Kartanegara as an event to provide entertainment to the community in the form of erecting ayu poles, giving honorary titles, cannon blasts, *barsimbur* (spraying water on people who take part in the Erau ceremony) and can be considered as a way for the King of Kutai Kartanegara to perpetuate his existence and the existence of religious rituals.

The research was conducted from September 2021 to December 2021. During that period, the researcher spent a lot of time in Tenggarong City, Kutai Kartanegara Regency, collecting data while conducting research in the field. The researcher also traveled to several areas in various locations in Kutai Kartanegara Regency. Throughout the research process, the researcher tried to build good relationships with them and also took the initiative to be their friend in providing

an understanding to non-lower-class groups about understanding in terms of social aspects in everyday life, especially the Kutai Kartanegara community.

The research informants were varied, namely the King of Kutai Kartanegara, traditional leaders, religious leaders, community leaders, government, individuals, and the community in Kutai Kartanegara.

### **2.3 Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques**

The research was supported by data originating from primary data through observation and in-depth interviews. *First*, observation was done by direct observation and systematic recording of the objects to be studied. When conducting observations, the instrument is a fieldnote and camera that photographs the activities of the Erau procession. *Second*, in-depth interviews were conducted to determine the attitudes, behaviors, and ways of thinking of the King of Kutai Kartanegara, traditional leaders, religious leaders, community leaders, government, individuals, and the community towards Erau. The interviews used various data collection instruments in the form of interview guidelines in the form of questions developed during the research, recording conversations using a mobile phone, and field notes to briefly describe the context of behavior, feelings of informants, reactions to experiences that have been passed through and brief reflections on the personal meaning and significance of the event.

In addition to primary data, this study also used secondary data as supporting data to understand research issues related to the attitudes, behavior, and ways of thinking of the King of Kutai Kartanegara, traditional leaders, religious leaders, community leaders, government, individuals and the community which is sourced from books and research journals that have been conducted by previous researchers and published online or published in print.

### **2.4 Data Analysis Techniques**

The steps to analyze the data that has been obtained and conceptualized by the informant are carried out by ethnography. The first step is to transcribe the data obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions stored in interview recordings and field notes. The second step is to read all the data, then detect the themes that emerge and sort them into parts conceptualized by the informant to be used as discussion topics. The third step, a detailed analysis of theme segments, refers to systematic testing of something to determine its parts, the relationship between the parts and the whole, and interpret it to make it possible to find various problems and find the cultural meaning of aura understood by the King of Kutai Kartanegara, customary leaders, religious leaders, community leaders, government, individuals and communities related to the topic being studied. The fourth step is to describe holistically and integratively to get a native's point of view of everything found regarding the topic and research focus and combine it with the relevant theoretical idea domain.

## **3. RESULTS**

Based on the research results, it was found that the Erau tradition has a vital role in shaping the character values of the younger generation. These values include cooperation between the kingdom, local government, and the community, as well as other values such as unity, cooperation, tolerance, social awareness, recognition of excellence, democracy, work ethics, and respect for culture.

Before implementing the *Pelas Benua* Erau tradition, the relatives of the Kutai Kartanegara Ing Martadipura Sultanate first carried out a sacred ritual called *Beluluh Awal*. The Sultan's *Beluluh awal* ritual ceremony took place at the Palace of the Kutai Kartanegara ing Martadipura Sultanate, which the Sultan of Kutai Aji Muhammad Arifin carried out.

Several preparations have been made to carry out the Sultan's *Beluluh Awal* Ritual, such as a yellow bamboo hall with 41 pillars covered with yellow cloth and several other materials. Before the initial *beluluh* ritual is performed, a yellow bamboo hall is displayed in the middle of the Kedaton room, and several ritual preparation offerings are offered. In this ritual, several lodging places and residents also contain rice, bananas, coconuts, and other offerings used by the Sultanate's relatives.

After the Sultan sat on the third level of the bamboo hall covered in yellow cloth, the next step was to recite a mantra by the *Pawang* of the ritual. Then, the *Pawang* asked the Sultan what he was asking for from God. There are two offers made by the *Pawang*: asking for safety, a long life, and freedom from disease for the Sultan and his family, as well as asking for safety for all the people of Kutai Kartanegara and East Kalimantan. After that, the event committee spelled the mantra again, and four relatives of the Palace stood on the four sides of the left and right corners of the Sultan while spreading a yellow cloth called *Kirab Tuhing*.

Accompanied by the reading of the mantras from the handler, the event carried out the Tepong Tawar Ritual to the Sultan of Kutai, and then the Sultan came down from the hall to carry out the Kalai Loose procession with several selected people.

*"This procession is a traditional ceremony that aims to purify the Sultan from various negative things and to ask for safety for the people of Kukar during the Erau,"* explained by Prince Noto Negoro, a relative of the Kutai Ing Martadipura Sultanate.

Mantras in the Erau tradition play an essential role in organizing society and determining social relations between citizens. Mantras motivate the community to carry out their daily lives. In addition, mantras also inspire as an effective communication tool between the king and the community and a medium for spreading important messages and information from the king to the community.

The *Besawai* ceremony is held in a solemn atmosphere so that the ceremony feels sacred. This is one of the factors that when the ceremony is taking place, the participants are not allowed to make noise because it is considered to disturb the ceremony, so there could be a mistake in reciting the *Besawai* reading. The important ceremonial equipment in *Besawai* is a small bed that is given a "Yellow Mosquito Net". In this yellow mosquito net, there are royal heirlooms, such as *Gong Raden Galuh*, *Gong Margapati*, *Gong bende malo mama manjan*, *pinggan tuba*, *sangko orphans*, *miandau orphans*, *sangkok ekor Yupa*, head of the Shiva statue and several heirlooms (Sani, 2016).

Then, a fireplace was prepared, complete with embers. Yellow *keris* in a container, even sesame placed in a special container. After that, they carry out the *Besawai* ceremony solemnly. First, prepare all the requirements, then bring in a yellow mosquito net. In the mosquito net lead the ceremony, and the closest family sit kneeling. Next, the Kutai traditional leaders pile up sesame and scatter yellow rice, accompanied by the reading of mantras.

"*Hang Laeng Purwa yaketi, Hunggu yaketi honggo tingga yaka sejati ming teman ingсан dalam sangga buwono sanghiyang ayu. Sanghiyang sukma, sanghiyang mulia, sanghiyang geridewa, sanghiyang pelara, dewa muru walo jaito muru sango. Sanghiyang neng danghiyang pungguh, sanghiyang ponggong, sanghiyang uang, sanghiyang guru, sanghiyang noroda, sanghiyang wisnu, sanghiyang dewibermani, sanghiyang pari ikanan, sanghiyang teri tesito, sanghiyang manu manoso, sanghiyang sutapan, sanghiyang sakuteram, sanghiyang sakti, sanghiyang palosero, Sanghiyang abiyoso, sanghiyang pandu dewanoto, sanghiyang arjuna, sanghiyang angkowijoyo, sanghiyang parekesit, sanghiyang udoyono, sanghiyang joyoboyo, sanghiyang amiseno, sanghiyang pandan rejo, sanghiyang jatro bomo, sanghiyang sulwili selo, sanghiyang dewoto cangkar, sanghiyang danis wero, sanghiyang kendi awan, sanghiyang kandiawan, sanghiyang panji paving, sanghiyang seri gotayu, sanghiyang lembu ame luhur, sanghiyang panji pening, sanghiyang banjaran sari, sanghiyang ario bangsa, sanghiyang senopati dewa rejo.*"

Taken from: (Izhariansyah in Sani, 2014).

The spellings by the *Belian* shaman are directed toward the Sanghiyang spirit beings. The characteristics of the mantra used are spoken language and the mention of all the supernatural beings believed to be the rulers of the supernatural realm. The meaning of the mantra is intended to seek permission from the rulers of the supernatural realm to hold the Erau event, to ensure the smooth conduct of the Kutai Kartanegara Erau activities, and to simultaneously empower the king who leads his people. After the spellings, it is believed that the aura of the king's face becomes radiant.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Humans are social beings who, in their interactions, are inseparable from the social group called society. This society runs a cultural system that is formed and carried out through generations as a means of interaction and communication (Meinarno et al., 2024). As social beings, humans develop within a specific socio-cultural life system of a community. Social groups share social life in the form of customs and traditions, including mantras. The presence of a mantra is closely related to human belief in the unseen and supernatural world.

In the Erau tradition in Kutai Kartanegara, mantras have a very important role as part of traditional rituals and processions. Mantras in this ceremony are usually delivered by traditional leaders or *belian* (traditional shamans), who are considered to have a special relationship with the supernatural and the ancestors. The spell is believed to have magical powers. The contents of mantras in the Erau tradition usually consist of requests for protection, blessings, and prosperity for the community.

Characteristics of Mantras in Erau include using spoken language, mentioning or summoning ancestral spirits or gods and goddesses, using words that are difficult for the general public to understand because they use ancient or symbolic language that is only understood by the ritual



leader or *belian*, spoken in a tone and a certain rhythm, which is believed to strengthen its magical powers. The findings of this research are similar to Mastikah's findings in that in terms of form, mantras contain many words that are less commonly used in everyday life (Mastikah et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, according to Saddhono, mantras have three forms, namely: (1) words called *japa*; mantras; *aji-aji*; *rapal*, (2) writing, for example, written on metal, paper, cloth, leather, bamboo, nails, flowers is called *raja*, and (3) mantras whose power is embedded in objects are called talismans; for example on agate stones, sticks, canes, and keris. He also found a form of mantras in the form of *macapat* songs, which were bound by the conventions of *guru lagu*, *guru wilangan*, and *guru gatra* (Saddhono & Hartata, 2016).

Different forms of mantras for specific purposes. According to Anita et al., the structure of the Kokoda tribe's healing mantras can be broadly divided into two types, namely perfect and imperfect mantras. A perfect mantra is a mantra that consists of opening, content, and closing elements. Meanwhile, imperfect mantras do not have complete elements, such as mantras that reduce heat, which only consist of opening elements and contents, then mantras for all illnesses and wounds mantras, which consist of only contents (Anita et al., 2015).

Mantras are used for various purposes. This research found that mantra in the Erau tradition is used to ask for safety and prosperity from God. Mantras are also used for the treatment or curing of a disease. According to Djamaris, a mantra is a linguistic composition that is infused with belief in a magical and magical world. Compositions in language and mantras also have unique word art. The words are chosen as carefully as the sentences are neatly arranged, as is the rhythm. Djamaris' research shows that efforts to cure disease by society are also determined by the perception of the causes of disease and pain as natural or unnatural for each individual. So mantras are one solution in efforts to cure this disease (Djamaris, 1990).

Traditional people, apart from mantras, use medicinal plants. According to Putri et al., from the results of their research, it was found that in the Kutai tribe in Muara Bengkal, the treatment media used during traditional treatment were medicinal plants (Putri et al., 2018). Health needs to be maintained because health is related to the highs and lows of an individual's life (Jennifer & Saptutyningih, 2015). Supardi & Susyanti wrote that there are three sources of treatment, namely self-medication, medical treatment, and traditional medicine (Supardi & Susyanti, 2010).

As Aisyah stated, alternative medicine almost never loses its fans or patients (Aisyah, 2017). The reason is that people use alternative medicine as a companion to medical treatment and even as an option. This is in line with Anita's claims that mantras were used in treatment (Anita et al., 2015). Maulana revealed that the languages used in the treatment mantras consisted of Sambas Malay, Indonesian, and Arabic. So, the diversity of perceptions of health and illness is determined by the knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms of each culture (Maulana, 2018). In Javanese, there are many different types of mantras and spells, such as those employed in traditional ceremonies, *penglaris* (attractive ways), healing mantras, and spirit-summoning (Irianingsih et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, Mirat argues that the meaning and function of mantras can be used as a source of learning material, especially literature. As a form of literacy, mantras can be used as a source of learning material for literature (Mirat, 2015). Mantra contains enormous educational pearls regarding its meaning and function, especially for developing imagination and developing literacy appreciation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on this discussion, the author draws the following conclusions. Using spoken language, referring to or calling forth ancestral spirits or gods and goddesses, employing words that are hard for the general public to understand because they use symbolic or ancient language that only the ritual leader or *belian* understands, and speaking in a tone and rhythm that is thought to enhance its magical powers are all characteristics of Erau mantras. There are several uses for mantras. It is used to pray to God for protection and wealth. It is utilized for spirit-summoning, cosmetic purposes, and the treatment or cure of illnesses. Mantra is used in Erau to ask the supernatural realm's rulers for permission to host the event, to make sure that Kutai Kartanegara Erau activities run smoothly, and to empower the king who governs his people. The aura of the king's face is said to grow brilliant after the spellings.

The research implies that the younger generation should be involved through cultural education in schools and holding festivals or cultural events that attract public interest. Documentation of traditions in the form of writing, video, and audio is also important so that culture can be preserved and recognized more widely, especially with the help of technology that allows the dissemination of information via social media. Collaboration with government and non-governmental organizations can also provide the necessary support in terms of funding and cultural recognition nationally and internationally, such as recognition from UNESCO, which will further strengthen efforts to preserve this tradition and culture.

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