



THE MEANING OF DULANG DANCE SYMBOL FOR THE MALAY COMMUNITY ACCORDING TO THE SEMIOTIC THEORY OF FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the meaning of the Dulang dance symbol based on its function in the Langkat Malay community according to the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. This research uses qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach. Data collection techniques carried out in this study include observation, interviews and documentation. Researchers as instruments went directly to the field to make engaged or participatory observations to obtain data in the form of detailed descriptive information about the meaning of the Dulang dance symbol in Langkat Regency. Basically, Dulang has a variety of meanings that can be adapted to the function of the Dulang in Malay traditional activities. It can be concluded that the symbolic meaning in this study is that Dulang is a signifier in Dulang dance and other Malay traditional activities. The signified Dulang in Dulang dance and Malay traditional activities include as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty, a symbol of prosperity, and a symbol of strength and power. The existence of Dulang for the Malays, not only as a container or place to place objects or food, but Dulang has a meaning that is able to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood in the Malay community.

Keywords: *Symbol Meaning, Dulang Dance, Semiotic Theory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is a marker of regional identity owned by every nation in Indonesia. Culture can also be said to be a lifestyle that grows and continues to develop in the community to regulate everyone in speaking, behaving, and interacting with other individuals. Soemardjan and Soemardi in their book entitled *Society and Culture*, argue that culture is all the work, taste, and creation of society (1964:113). Work includes technological and other material products, taste includes the human soul that is in harmony with social norms and values, while creation includes cognitive and mental abilities to practice what it knows.

In its implementation, there are several elements that shape culture, including art that includes various art forms, such as music, dance, painting, literature, architecture, and others. Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTH) is a cultural heritage from ancestors that is passed down from generation to generation where it is very valuable and has high usability (Purba, 2020). Intangible Cultural Heritage is considered to be able to encourage the birth of community initiatives in realizing cultural activities that have the value of creativity, innovation, inheritance of cultural values, preservation of local wisdom, strengthening the character of the nation, and cultural diversity and an attitude of intercultural tolerance. So that studies on culture are very important to be carried out in order to preserve regional cultural products.

Langkat Regency is one of the regencies in North Sumatra province that holds a lot of cultural potential in the arts. In reality, this potential is marginalized by the times, eroded by modernization, and indirectly begins to be forgotten by the owner of the culture. This is certainly a

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point of weakness that is relevant to the icon of Langkat Regency as well as wealth in North Sumatra Province.

Talking about culture, of course, it is related to the existence of the tribes that inhabit the region. Malays are one of the indigenous tribes of North Sumatra spread along the coast of the island of Sumatra. The distribution of Malay domiciles in North Sumatra is located in Langkat Regency, Binjai City, Medan City, Deli Serdang Regency, Serdang Bedagai Regency, Tebing Tinggi City, Batubara Regency, Tanjung Balai City, and Labuhan Batu Regency.

The art and cultural products in each of the districts and cities mentioned above are inseparable from the sites of the Malay kingdom that was once established in its time. The form of the kingdom in the Malays was led by a sultan or *datuk*. These Malay kingdoms are usually marked by the establishment of the palace as a marker of the splendor and sovereignty of the king and the whole family who then make the palace a place to live, deliberate, and decide on a *hajat*. Such as Langkat Regency with its Langkat sultanate, which currently only lives in Azizi Mosque as a witness to the history of the spread of Islam which stands in the city of Tanjungpura, and stores a wealth of art and culture such as history, dance, music, martial arts, literary arts; folklore, and a culture of distinctive culinary presentation. One of the diversity of arts and culture is found in the Dulang dance.

Dulang dance is a traditional dance originating from Malay. Traditional dance is divided into two, namely traditional palace dance or classical dance and traditional folk dance. According to Jazuli, traditional palace dance is a dance that lives and develops among the palace and is only used for palace events. While traditional folk dance is a dance that lives and develops among the local people (Ratnaningrum, 2011). However, on its journey, the richness of various art and cultural products has not become a reference basis by the community and local government to preserve and grow it to future generations.

Langkat Regency, Hinai District is used as a research location because Dulang art is believed to be the place where this art originated and has become a symbol of local wisdom in the area. The purpose of this study is to identify the meaning of the Dulang dance symbol based on the function in the Langkat Malay community according to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory.

Semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure explained semiotics in general as a science that examines the role of signs as part of social life (Mutiara, 2022). In theory, semiotics is divided into two parts (dichotomies), namely signifiers and signified. Markers seen in physical form or form can be recognized through the five senses, while markers are seen as meanings that are revealed through concepts, functions or values contained in markers (Yuliza, 2022). In simple terms, a signifier (*penanda*) is a physical element of a sign that can be a sign, word, image or sound. While signified (*petanda*) denotes an absolute concept that approaches the existing physical sign or in other words signified (*petanda*) is a concept and meanings. In dance, signified (*petanda*) is the meaning of a form of dance.

According to Kasmawati, a dance can be seen with Ferdinand Saussure's approach, namely as a relationship between movement as a marker and meaning as a sign based on certain conventions, which is commonly referred to as signification (Yuliza, 2022). The signification process shows between the sign and the external reality called the referent. Referent is interpreted



as an object by Saussure and mentions it as an additional element in a marking process (Mutiar, 2022).

Meaning and symbol are two things that cannot be separated and side by side. Meaning is the content of a symbol. Symbols come from the Greek word *symbolos* which means sign or characteristic that tells something to someone (Herusatoto, 2003). The unity of meaning and symbols can produce a form that contains intent. It can be concluded that between meaning and symbol are elements that are different and complementary.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This research uses qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach. According to Johnson and Christensen, ethnography is a qualitative research model that has the aim of describing the cultural characteristics contained in an individual or group of people who are members of a cultural community group (Wijaya, 2018).

Data collection techniques conducted in this study include observation, interviews and documentation. Researchers as instruments go directly to the field with engaged or participatory observations to hold observations, recordings, taking photo documentation, voice recordings and so on during the research process. This technique is carried out to obtain data in the form of detailed descriptive information about the meaning of the Dulang dance symbol in Langkat Regency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The history of the development of Malay culture at the beginning of the year AD, began with the Hindu Indians introducing Hindu culture and religion to the East Sumatra region. Malay in terms of culture, explains how the culture of the Malay tribe is conducted for generations and becomes a tradition for them. Dance, as one of the existing cultures, is an included part of their life activities. The tradition of including dance is also conducted by the Malays in the North Sumatra region, as a form of expression of heart realized through dance works. The traditional dance performed is a work created according to the rules agreed upon by the Malay community. Some dance works from the Malay lands are based on martial arts forms such as *Silat*.

In general, *Silat* is understood as martial arts as an effort to defend yourself from mistreatment by others. *Silat* is a traditional martial art originating from the archipelago. There are more than 500 types of martial arts schools throughout the archipelago. According to Rahman Ismail, the description of the technique of war or resistance between Malay heroes is a description of the Malay *Silat* that is more than 2000 years old (Zainun, 2017: 17). Departing from *Silat* this is what prompted the birth of the famous Dulang dance work from the Langkat area, North Sumatra.

3.1 Dulang in Malay Life

Dulang is a circular tray that has a flat surface, edges have ornaments, and is legged. Dulang is made of copper, brass, or wood which is usually used as a place to put food. In the past Dulang was included in the offering process when there were religious rituals, as a place-to-place various offerings. Dulang is also used in the implementation of the tradition of eating together with family members or guests. The use of Dulang in Dulang dance is placed on the dancer's head.

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Figure 1. Dulang

One of the Malay cultural heritages that clearly shows the fusion of Islam and Malay culture is through the tradition of *Tepung Tawar*, which includes Dulang as a place for various equipment for *Tepung Tawar* event. In addition to *Tepung Tawar* event, Dulang is also used as a decoration for the living room as a bridal confectionery container for 7 days after the wedding. The Dulang is placed in the bridal chamber as a measure of the social strata in society. This is because the people who own Dulang are only people who are materially well-off or Malay nobles.



Figure 2. Inclusion of Dulang in the *Tepung Tawar* Event

In addition to the functions mentioned above, Dulang is also used as a property in the Dulang Dance for the Malays. The Dulang dance is performed the day before the "Ijab Kabul" is performed. Dulang in Dulang dance is used as a place to put plates and candles. Dulang is one fruit in which consists of several plates filled with lit candles. The number of plates and candles can be both odd and even. Dulang is divided into three sizes, large, medium, and small. The large Dulang has a diameter of 45 cm with an inner circumference of 35 cm, and a height of 20 cm, the



medium Dulang has a diameter of 30 cm with an inner circumference of 20 cm, and a height of 15 cm, while the small Dulang has a diameter of 27 cm with an inner circumference of 18 cm, and a height of 15 cm.



Figure 3. Dulang as Dance Property



Figure 4. Dulang in Three Different Sizes

3.2 Dulang Art

For the Malay community, art activities were initially only carried out as entertainment after being tired from work. Malays dance by performing irregular movements and only expressions of feelings of joy. This inspired Malay artists to create dances that underlie people's daily lives. Departing from this, the Malays composed the movements and formed a dance, where

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the dance was staged in various activities. The Malays make dance a complement, but its implementation is not a necessity. So that if the dance is not performed, the ceremony can still be performed. This is certainly very reasonable, because the Malay community uses religious teachings as guidelines. Religious teachings take precedence in every activity, so that the implementation of dance is only as entertainment and complementary in activities.

Dulang dance is performed on several traditional activities such as at wedding ceremonies, as a livening event, and even as a welcoming dance. This dance is found in many Malays in several regions of North Sumatra, such as Langkat Regency, Binjai City, Medan City, Deli Serdang Regency, Serdang Bedagai Regency, and Tebing Tinggi City. The difference in names and differences in performing dances is one of the interesting things to know. One dance performed at one event in the life of the Malay people has different names, shapes, number of dancers and properties used. This can certainly be seen from the distribution of Malay tribes in North Sumatra, which will reveal the history of the origin of the Dulang dance in the Malay community. Where it is in line with Poerwadarminta (Rambe, 2012: 3) that history contains 3 (three) meanings:

1. Old literature: genealogy, origin
2. Events and events that happened in the past.
3. Science, stories of lessons about events and events that happened in the past.

According to Saefur Rochmat (2009:6), history is:

".....a study that seeks to gain an understanding of everything in order to gain an understanding of everything that has been experienced (including those spoken, thought, and implemented) by humans in the past whose evidence can still be traced/found in the present."

Based on this explanation, it is clear that Dulang dance is a product that has been made by the Malays based on a long history and is used for certain purposes. The process of its creation was not only created out of thin air, but based on customs that became customary rules in the Malay tribe. The creation of Dulang dance is not known exactly when, where, who, and why this dance existed. According to the source, Dulang dance has existed since the sultanate in the Langkat region.

During the Langkat sultanate, Dulang dance was staged and intended only for the nobility in the coronation of the king, *Berina* (marriage) night and the harvest period. Dulang dance performances during the sultanate became an important dance, this was related to the strength of the royal commanders and soldiers. Symbols of strength and power are conveyed through dance moves. Dulang dance performances at that time had special rules that had to be obeyed, such as dancers were a group of king's bodyguards (including the royal commanders at that time). Dulang dance movement is a movement that is based on the *Silat* movement which is performed with low easel movements. The guards, as well as the commanders-in-chief did so with a clean and solemn heart, especially at the coronation of the king.

In addition to being staged at royal events, Dulang dance is also staged at the end of the harvest, usually the Langkat people dance Dulang dance as their gratitude for the harvest they received and as a request to reject reinforcements. As for the staging, it is carried out neither in an open room nor indoors.



Figure 5. The Use of Dulang in Dulang dance Performed by Three Male Dancers

Dulang dance is also performed at the *Bainai Night* event with the same presentation pattern but without the use of Dulang, this dance is known as Inai Dance which is usually performed by four dancers. Over time, this dance can be performed to the general public and can be danced by the general public. In its development, Dulang dance is not only part of the procession of royal activities, but various activities have included Dulang dance as a performance at certain events. The development of Dulang dance is also characterized by the development of the presentation of dance as an aesthetic need, while still relying on pre-existing standards. *Silat* became the main movement pattern developed into the Dulang dance movement.

3.3 Meaning of Symbols in Dulang dance

Based on the data described above, it can be found that the use of Dulang as a property of Dulang dance is a signifier. Dulang is a circular tray made of copper, brass, or wood and is usually used as a place-to-place food. The use of Dulang in the past was used in diversity processions as a place to place offerings and was also used in the implementation of the tradition of eating with the Malay community when entertaining guests.

The symbolic meaning of Dulang is as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty. In the event of *Tepung Tawar*, Dulang is an indicator that a person has a high social strata in society. In Dulang dance, Dulang is used as a place to put plates and candles which has meaning as knowledge for brides-to-be to live a household. The use of plates in Dulang has the meaning of prosperity, which is the hope of happiness and well-being for the bride-to-be who will build a household. In addition to giving prosperity to the bride-to-be, the meaning of the plate also implies prosperity to anyone.

Dulang dance performances during the sultanate were related to the power of the royal commanders and soldiers. Symbols of power and power are conveyed through dance moves. This shows the power of an empire that has bodyguards who provide security, comfort, and tranquility for the king and all his subjects. The Dulang dance performance was also staged at the end of the harvest, as his gratitude for the harvest he received and as a request for reinforcements rejection.

4. CONCLUSION

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Basically, Dulang has a variety of meanings that can be adapted to the function of the Dulang in Malay traditional activities. Based on the results of the discussion, it can be concluded that the symbolic meaning in this study, namely Dulang, is a signifier (*penanda*) in Dulang dance and other Malay traditional activities. The meaning of Dulang signified (*petanda*) in Dulang dance and Malay traditional activities has a broad meaning, including as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty, a symbol of prosperity that has the meaning of hope for happiness and well-being, and a symbol of strength and power which has the meaning of security, comfort and tranquility. Dulang has the meaning of prosperity, happiness and welfare that can strengthen the bonds of brotherhood in the Malay community.

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Mr. Zun from Sei Wampu, as the performer of Dulang dance