Gendhing Dhanyangan as Cultural Preservation for Relation with Nature and The Ancestor

Dika Sri Pandanari

1Character Building Development Center, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11480

Abstract. Gendhing Dhanyangan is a tradition in various Java regions, one of which is in Selokerto, Malang Regency. This tradition is inherited and continues to be carried out to respect the current community's relationship with their ancestors and nature. Dhanyang, or ancestors, symbolizes the community's bond with the forces of nature. This tradition preserves the relationship between humans and the existence of nature and ancestors believed to be empowered by God to create life today. This study used a method, namely interviews involving the experiences, knowledge, and beliefs of traditional actors, and the data analysis used was a qualitative phenomenological method involving two aspects, the meaning of the actor and holistic narrative. This research found the value of preserving cultural values through community activities in the form of Gendhing Dhanyangan. This cultural activity can inherit people's knowledge about the importance of culture based on the existence of ancestors and nature.

1 Introduction

Gendhing Dhanyangan is a tradition often found in various regions of Java, especially in Central Java and East Java. Gendhing Dhanyangan is a tradition of chanting certain tones intended to connect the performers with an entity known as Dhanyang or Dhanyangan. Gendhing itself means music played through a set of gamelan without human vocals. While Dhanyangan is an entity that exceeds humans, is invisible and is very old. Dhanyangan itself is often interpreted as certain spirits. [1] The spirit here can be an ancestral spirit, an ancestral will, a personified natural law, or a soul that is alive but does not have a physical body but can communicate and establish relationships with humans well.

1.1 Gendhing Dhanyangan as Cultural Belief

The belief system in Java recognizes this kind of spiritualism, so many types of spirits are believed, including Dhanyang. Dhanyangan is generally believed to be responsible for protecting, guarding, warning, and accompanying humans. Javanese people, in general, also believe that Dhanyangan has a personality that is not far from human, such as being happy, angry, worried, and so on. Hence, it needs to be respected as an ordinary human being. Each village or region believes in a Dhanyang entity with a different name. Some believe that Dhanyang lives in remote places in the village, and some believe that Dhanyang lives in various regional borders to guard against the entry of calamity, disease, or danger. In Selokerto, at least two Dhanyang inhabit the area around the outer side of the village. They are believed to be the spirits of the ancestral villagers who have cleared the land for agriculture and residents' homes (also known as bedhah krawang). These figures are then believed by the people who carry out Gendhing Dhanyangan as the ancestors.

The phenomenon of belief in Dhanyangan is found not only in Java but in almost all places in Indonesia and in areas that still inherit various derivations of Eastern customs. Such a system is commonly called indigenous people's belief in ancestral spirits [2]. The Dhanyang is not believed to be a significant figure like God but only acts as a protector who can interact with humans. In Javanese cosmology, the virtual and spirit worlds, small and large universes, rational and irrational worlds, and visible and visible worlds cannot be separated because they are interconnected [2]. Therefore, it is common for Javanese people to interact with spirits like Dhanyang in various ways, such as singing songs, making offerings, lighting incense, cleaning unique places, and mentioning their names in prayer. The firm belief of these indigenous peoples causes the tradition of communicating in Dhanyang to exist today still.

Because Dhanyang is considered an entity without physical existence, interactions, and contracts with Dhanyang are usually carried out in a series of rites. Rite is an essential process for Javanese society [3] because it contains essential elements such as respect and gratitude. Rites are usually performed to celebrate Thanksgiving on certain religious holidays, village cleaning processions, regional anniversaries, and other activities that require special intentions, such as weddings, baby births, and circumcision. So Gendhing Dhanyangan is not played as entertainment but as a form of interaction with the Dhanyang. Gendhing is generally done as a request for safety, kindness, and protection [4]. This tradition later became why Gendhing Dhanyangan had to be sung for the first time in a series of traditional music in Java.

* Corresponding author: dika.sri@binus.ac.id
1.2 Gendhing Dhanyangan as Tradition

As in various corners of Indonesia, Javanese people, especially in Selokerto in this study, still preserve their ancestral traditions such as Gendhing Dhanyangan. Contemporary Javanese society still consistently preserves the teachings of Javanese philosophy, even though the lifestyle has undergone many changes [4]. In the Gendhing Dhanyangan procession itself, there are still many young people and children who participate in it, both acting as music players and spectators. This has become part of a momentary habit, besides that the Javanese people are still strong in maintaining their philosophy of prioritizing the needs of the mind and soul [5].

The phenomenon of belief in Dhanyangan is found not only in Java but in almost all places in Indonesia and in areas that still inherit various derivations of Eastern customs. Such a system is commonly referred to as indigenous people's belief in ancestral spirits [6]. The Dhanyang is not believed to be a great figure like God but only acts as a protector who can interact with humans. In Javanese cosmology, the virtual world and the spirit world, the small and large universes, the rational and irrational worlds, and the visible and visible worlds cannot be separated because they are interconnected with each other [7]. Therefore, it is common for Javanese people to interact with spirits like Dhanyang in various ways, such as singing songs, making offerings, lighting incense, cleaning special places, and mentioning their names in prayer. The strong belief of these indigenous peoples causes the tradition of communicating in Dhanyang to still exist today. Because Dhanyang is considered as an entity without physical existence, interactions, and contacts with Dhanyang are usually carried out in a series of rites. Rite is an important process for Javanese [5] because it contains important elements such as respect and gratitude. Rites are usually performed in celebration of thanksgiving on certain religious holidays, village cleaning processes, regional anniversaries, and other activities that require special intentions such as weddings, baby births, and circumcision. So Gendhing Dhanyangan is not played as entertainment but as a form of interaction with the Dhanyang. Gendhing is also generally done as a form of a request for safety, kindness, protection, etc [8] his later became the reason why Gendhing Dhanyangan had to be sung for the first time in a series of traditional music and rituals in Java.

As in various corners of Indonesia, Javanese people, especially in Selokerto in this study, still preserve their ancestral traditions such as Gendhing Dhanyangan. Contemporary Javanese society still consistently preserves the teachings of Javanese philosophy, even though the lifestyle has undergone many changes [5]. In the Gendhing Dhanyangan procession itself, there are still many young people and children who participate in it, both acting as music players and spectators. This has become part of a momentary habit, besides that the Javanese people are still strong in maintaining their philosophy of prioritizing the needs of the mind and soul [5].

2 Methods

The research was conducted in Selokerto, Malang Regency, East Java, as a plot from the Gendhing Dhanyangan tradition, mainly practiced in Java. This research was conducted in May–July 2022. The data collection method in this study was an interview method that involved the experience, knowledge, and beliefs of traditional actors consisting of representatives of cultural actors from Selokerto Village as well as kamituo (elders) and village officials. At the same time, the data analysis method chosen is a qualitative phenomenological method that involves two aspects: the meaning of the participant or the actor and the holistic description or overall view of the implementation of the Gendhing Dhanyangan tradition.

3 Discussion

3.1 Participant's Meaning

Two aspects can be discussed in the Gendhing Dhanyangan phenomenon based on the participant's meaning analysis. The first is about the relationship of traditional actors with the retention of ancestral knowledge to carry out the tradition. The second is the eco-cultural relationship the villagers build with the Dhanyangan figure they trust. Both are related to the existence of the Gendhing Dhanyangan tradition, which is still practiced today.

The first concerns the retention of the 'pengendhing' or the musicians of Gendhing Dhanyangan. The retention of music created by music composers is passed on to music players and even people who believe in Gendhing Dhanyangan. This retention generates the desire to preserve tradition and the expectations that arise when music is played [9]. Retention in Gendhing Dhanyangan represents the knowledge that settles, which can encourage hope as a definition of action [10]. In implementing the Gendhing Dhanyangan music, the musicians convey respect and hope to the spirit, which is understood as Dhanyangan.

Musicians are urged to preserve this tradition without a backdrop of financial need or retribution. For them, playing Gendhing Dhanyangan is a matter of pride. Through music, there is a motivation that can recontextualize a person from a "spatial" concept to a process-oriented one [11]. In the practice of Gendhing Dhanyangan, musicians voluntarily devote their time and energy to creating a spatial awareness in which humans live together with other spirits they respect. This harmony is the tendency of people who still apply classical customs. The phenomenon of respecting Dhanyang through Gendhing Dhanyangan is part of a conceptual 'becoming' process in which humans live in harmony with other spirits around them. This relationship is built differently than through music devoted to the Dhanyang. Music and sound have long influenced the atmosphere [12]. This art enables the people of Selokerto village to maintain and even develop their understanding of Dhanyangan’s role in their lives.
The second concerns the eco-cultural relationship between the people of Selokerto and the Dhanyang they trust. This analysis emerges from the proposal of Jackson et. All the participants' experience is used to identify the structure, which is a phenomenon [13]. In this eco-cultural relationship, the people of Selokerto believe that the Dhanyang love them and protect their area. Meanwhile, the community also believes that humans must love the Dhanyang respectfully, express gratitude, and welcome the Dhanyang in every joint activity in the village. The people of Selokerto independently realized that Dhanyang had protected them and contributed to the opening of the area where they lived. Independent here means that they voluntarily believe in it. There is no threat if one rejects the Dhanyang concept, nor is there any compulsion to believe in it. The ancestors' teachings are habitual and are translated by each generation voluntarily [12]. This teaching makes the intersubjective-conceptual relationship that is built naturally. Gendhing Dhanyangan’s belief must be interpreted as a fact that naturally creates various meanings of society, whereas phenomenology can be considered a natural phenomenon [14].

Despite the existence of Dhanyang, who can be trusted on the one hand and questioned on the other, the people of Selokerto voluntarily accept the concept of their existence. This voluntarism gives rise to an intersubjective-conceptual relationship in which empirically real humans create or affirm the presence of other figures who can relate to them to protect their territory. Each phenomenon in a series responds to a principle that can be considered its essence, meaning that this response follows the phenomenal picture of the perceived action [15]. In this case, people's trust in Dhanyangan, which is represented through Gendhing Dhanyangan, is a basic form of response. The fact that the village of Selokerto has been inhabited for approximately seven generations gives rise to a powerful concept of 'ancestor.' The act of respecting Dhanyangan through Gendhing Dhanyangan is a manifestation of public awareness (in the form of a praxis image) based on an essential concept [15], namely the provision of life.

3.2 Holistic Accounts: Javanese society on Gendhing Dhanyangan

Traditions such as ngalap blessing (asking for blessings) and slametan (expressing gratitude) still apply in Javanese society [16], while Gendhing Dhanyangan is a union of the two. This tradition has a role in the continuity of people's daily lives, directly and indirectly, correlated. A direct correlation, for example, with the emergence of interactions between communities during the traditional process. Meanwhile, the indirect correlation is the formation of ethical beliefs and traditions, which are influenced by the presence of tradition. There is a relationship between the implementation of Gendhing Dhanyangan, the understanding of the people in Selokerto Village about nature, and the origins of the village. In addition, this phenomenon shows an ethical formulation that is inclusive in the relationship between humans and nature through the art form of music [17].

Through the phenomenon of Gendhing Dhanyangan, there is a holistic phenomenon that can be observed: a close relationship between humans, nature, and the personification of nature called Gendhing Dhanyangan. This phenomenon is assumed to originate from the belief of the people of Eastern tradition that the human soul is bound to other entities such as holy spirits, ancestral spirits, and natural forces. Humans create personifications and even narratives of their existence to understand these spirit figures. Existence and meaning are human actions [15]. There is a debate across different approaches to science about the origins of this kind of belief. However, the most important implication of this phenomenon is that humans can give birth to meaning from things that are believed; these things then give birth to knowledge, interpretation, and even a new culture.

In the study of Dhanyangan, humans need a personification of a person who is stronger or at least complements human incompetence in some areas. In the Selokerto community's belief regarding Dhanyang, it is believed that Dhanyang has several services, including opening residential land for the village community, protecting natural conditions so that they can be appropriately used, maintaining the security and health of the village community, preventing the village community from dangers such as infectious diseases, drought, poverty, and civil strife. However, the figure of Dhanyangan is not equated with the almighty God. Some people believe that Dhanyangan is the soul – distinguished from the spirit – of the first ancestor who opened the forest to become a dwelling place. This belief means that Dhanyangan comes from humans who incarnate a principle of Dhanyangan, who is a creation of God who carries out the task. Another opinion states that Dhanyangan is a non-physical entity that has existed since the island's land was formed; the entity is a ruler who allows villagers to live there with regulations that are by religious teachings, generally believed to be acculturated with Islamic teachings.

From the various interpretations, the people of Selokerto still agree that Dhanyangan is an entity created by God to accompany the village community properly. 'Good' means Dhanyang's job is to maintain natural conditions that humans cannot manage to stay awake. This belief is why every respectful action for Dhanyangan is carried out with a sacred attitude. In modern times, the sacredness manifested in the Gendhing Dhanyangan tradition is identified with gratitude for Dhanyangan's assistance in maintaining village security. Through this holistic understanding, the village community brings up to identification between Dhanyangan, ancestors, and the forces of nature. When nature experiences problems, such as landslides or droughts, the community returns to communicating with Dhanyang, who is believed to be there, to help the community restore the problematic nature.

Although Dhanyangan is not remembered or respected daily, Dhanyangan is always included in thanksgiving ceremonies, the center of which is manifested in offerings and Gendhing Dhanyangan. This
phenomenon shows a real example where communication and ecocultural relations emerge as the main problem in a social system [12]. Villagers believe that Dhanyangan can understand human languages such as Javanese, Indonesian, and Arabic (the latter language is believed to be due to the emergence of acculturation of Javanese and Islamic cultures) [3]. The existence of Dhanyangan is proof that the human experience of interacting with nature and its environment can give birth to meaning and tradition. Only by understanding meaning through phenomenological experience can humans understand them (Dhanyangan) as beings [17].

The uniqueness of the phenomenon in Selokerto is that communication does not only arise through language but also feelings expressed through music. Gendhing has a vital role in the Gendhing Dhanyangan tradition, where human communication that is difficult to express or communication that is built with a person who is challenging to define can be expressed well through media that goes beyond language, namely music. Music taught from generation to generation through formal and informal teaching is evidence that humans experience a relationship to being 'Being' by creating a tradition to communicate with non-physical entities that they believe.

The eco-cultural relationships built in this tradition cannot be separated from the condition of the community, the majority of which are farmers and land workers. Nature and humans are interconnected entities. Nature is part of humans and vice versa; humans are part of nature. This relationship is ideally described as an activity of respect. Nature provides the possibility for humans to live by providing various living resources – which are commonly referred to as natural resources.

Meanwhile, humans respect nature in various ways, such as protecting nature, absorbing natural inspiration, and creating rituals devoted to respecting nature. Like the prayer process, respect for nature is carried out not only in one particular condition. Under certain conditions, humans can also occasionally express gratitude towards nature.

Nature with unpredictable conditions causes humans to need a figure or entity to help them manage nature. This relationship to being 'Being' by creating a tradition to communicate with non-physical entities that they believe. Gendhing Dhanyangan is a manifestation of the appreciation of the Javanese people, one in Selokerto, for the existence of ancestors and the forces of nature. In some conditions, society does not distinguish between the two existences. However, the figure of Dhanyangan is usually given a nickname to distinguish his existence from the forces of nature. Gendhing Dhayangan is a culture that can inherit experience retention by analyzing participants’ meanings. This retention can make people aware that their current culture comes from their ancestors. In addition, this tradition also makes people aware that there are entities that have more power over nature than humans. Through holistic analysis of records, there is a relationship between people's understanding of the unity of nature and their ancestors. With the Gendhing Dhanyangan tradition, the process of inheritance and preservation of culture in Selokerto and Java, in general, can be carried out well, significantly binding identity and culture as Javanese.

References


