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# Reactivating the Oral Literary Cultural Tradition in the Rural Area 'Tembang Batanghari Sembilan' in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia: Current Situation and Initiatives

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#### Abstract

Tembang Batanghari Sembilan (TBS) is a cultural heritage that possesses a wealth of traditional values and unique art, although it confronts significant obstacles stemming from a dearth of interest among the succeeding generation. This research examines the history and conditions of the Batanghari Sembilan Tembang Tradition today and the cultural re-actualization activities carried out by many players, such as artists, cultural organizations, local communities, and local governments. This study also employed a sociological methodology known as socio-cultural evolution, which is utilized to examine cultural transformations and adjustments that arise in response to the demands of contemporary society. The ramifications of creative actualization extend beyond the preservation of cultural history, encompassing endeavors to bolster local identity, foster a sense of unity, and enhance the social fabric of the community. This research offers a thorough depiction of the cultural dynamics of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan. It offers an essential understanding of the endeavors to conserve and revive the advancement of traditional culture in the modern day.

Keywords: Tembang Batanghari Sembilan, Reactivating, Oral Literature.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

South Sumatra is a province in Indonesia known for its rich and varied cultural legacy, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects Bambang Budi Utomo, Palembang City From Wanua Sriwijaya To Modern Palembang (Palembang: Palembang City Government, 2012)., such as oral literature. Oral literature is a component of a local culture that originates from society and is transmitted from one generation to another through spoken communication. Oral literature serves multiple purposes, including amusement, validation of social and cultural institutions, and monitoring of societal standards to ensure compliance (Bascom, 1995; Dundes, 1976). In addition to that, oral literature serves as an educational instrument for the younger generation to enhance communal cohesion and solidarity, as well to enforce social norms, offer social critique, and provide pleasureSY Sudikan, Oral Literature Research Methods (Lamongan: Grup Pustaka Ilalang, 2014)... Oral literature, a component of folklore, possesses distinct characteristics: (1) it is transmitted and inherited orally, (2) it is rooted in tradition, (3) it exists in multiple versions and variants, (4) it lacks authorship attribution, and (5) it adheres to established forms. Patterned, (6) has a purpose or role in the daily life of a cultural group, (7) is petrological, (8) is interconnected, (9) is innocent and naive to the extent that it can often be perceived as impolite or overly spontaneous. (Danandjaja, 2007)

Tembang Batanghari Sembilan (TBS) is a distinctive form of oral literature found in South Sumatra. Tembang Batanghari Sembilan is an oral literary genre characterized by rhymed verses accompanied by a solitary guitar and performed by one or more individuals (Sariasih, 2016). This song initially gained popularity solely in specific regions along the Batanghari River. The Batanghari River refers to a group of nine major rivers that converge into the Musi River. These rivers are the Beliti River, Kelingi River, Rawas River, Lakitan River, Batang Leko River, Rupit River, Komering River, Lematang River, and Ogan River.

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Throughout history, the inhabitants of South Sumatra have utilized the song Batanghari Sembilan as a kind of amusement to occupy their leisure hours instead of engaging in idle conversation or indulging in fantasies. When this song is performed, individuals typically congregate and engage in collective play, fostering social bonds among communities. Nevertheless, the rise of advanced technology and the world's growing interconnectedness have eradicated old limitations and norms in community interactions, leading to a decline in the younger generation's inclination to pursue traditional arts in their localities.

This research examines the circumstances and initiatives to revive the Tembang Batanghari Sembilan cultural tradition, particularly in Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra Province. It highlights the waning interest among the younger generation and the endeavors made to preserve the cultural heritage in the region. This dissertation provides an elucidation of the historical background and contextual factors surrounding the Batanghari Sembilan Tembang custom in the Ogan Ilir district of South Sumatra. Next, we shall proceed to the endeavors aimed at realizing the cultural customs of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan and the individuals participating in them.

The analysis of this proposed conversation will be conducted through the lens of socio-cultural evolutionary theory and rationalization theory. Sanderson's theory of socio-cultural evolution, (Ritzer, 2003) is employed to elucidate the factors behind the resurgence of the Tembang Batanghari Sembilan tradition, with a particular focus on the process of socio-cultural evolution. According to this view, societal complexity leads to actualization as society adjusts to changing situations. This re-actualization of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan can also be seen as an adaptive response to change.

#### RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to carefully elucidate the facts, characteristics, and relationships among the phenomena under investigation. Observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and literature analysis were some of the methods used to gather data. The research methodology employed in this study utilizes case studies to comprehensively examine and comprehend the issue under investigation. The data analysis strategy employs the Miles and Huberman analytical approach, specifically involving data reduction, presentation, and verification(Sugiyono, 2017). Data reduction is the process of condensing, choosing, and concentrating on crucial elements, while also identifying patterns and themes within the study. Data display occurs subsequent to data reduction. In qualitative research, data is typically given in the form of narrative prose. Data verification is then conducted to assess the study's results.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

# The Historical Background and Current Circumstances of the Batanghari Sembilan Tembang Tradition

The historical background and current circumstances of the Batanghari Sembilan Tembang tradition. Batanghari Sembilan refers to a genre of artistic expression that involves reciting rhymes accompanied by the strumming of a single guitar. The Batanghari Sembilan song is a river-based cultural phenomenon in a broader context. The music prevalent in this culture exhibits a romantic, melancholic, and nature-inspired subtlety.

The music and art of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan are said to have their roots in spoken word literature, or *pantun* in the Besemah region, which is also one of the locations of Batanghari Sembilan. According to cultural analyst Ahmad Bastari, the Batanghari Sembilan rhythm is believed to have originated in the 1950s. During the 1960s and 1970s, Tembang Batanghari Sembilan performances were characterized by the employment of a single guitar as the sole accompaniment to the lyrics. Subsequently, the solitary pluck of the guitar became associated with the Batanghari Sembilan song, specifically referred to as "single guitar" or "berejung".

The song Batanghari Sembilan, originally titled "Petikan Dewi," is performed with a single guitar strum. Dewi is the moniker of a solitary guitarist hailing from the Besemah region. According to another viewpoint, the Batanghari Sembilan song is believed to have originated from a form of spoken word literature known as rejung in the Besemah region. Djaafar Malik, an artist from Jambat Bale, Pagar Alam, claimed to have coined the term

"Batanghari Sembilan rhythm," according to Sahilin, the maestro and mascot of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan. Sahilin's perspective reinforces the notion that Tembang Batanghari Sembilan has its roots in the Lahat region (before its separation in 2001, Pagar Alam City was a part of the Lahat Regency).

Over time, the art of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan, known as rejung, started to incorporate more primitive musical instruments such as getuk, getak-getung (made from bamboo), redap (made from animal leather), and gung/kenung (made from iron). The accompanying instruments for the Batanghari Sembilan rhythmic art have continued to diversify following advancements. These include gigging (made of iron), carat (a leaf-based musical instrument), stream (a bamboo-based musical instrument), accordion, violin, and guitar.

Tembang Batanghari Sembilan is a regional art developed in nine large rivers in South Sumatra. Batanghari Sembilan is a rhythmic art in the form of recited poetry, which is usually played between men and women with a single guitar playing as accompaniment. The terms used in each region are also different, such as the people of Pagar Alam and Semende, who call this art the term rejung, and the people of Muara Kuang, Ogan Ilir Regency, who call the rhythmic art of Batanghari Sembilan the term tembang. Meanwhile, several other categories include tige seragkai (three series), antan eight single guitars (acoustic) and tembang. The lyrical themes in Batanghari Sembilan rhythmic art are continuously adapted to the conditions of society at that time, which usually contain moral messages in the form of advice, love stories, or criticism of the government.

The poems performed in this artistic expression are also reiterated in multiple sections. This poem follows the structure of Malay poetry, with each stanza consisting of four lines. The first two lines serve as an introduction to the rhyme, while the remaining two lines include the main substance. Batanghari Sembilan has spread to many areas of South Sumatra, which is why the language used in poetry has changed a lot. It now includes the regional languages of Lahat, Ogan Ilir, Semende, Pagaralam, Muara Enim, Rambang, Muare Kuang, Benawe, Musi Banyuasin, Musi Rawas, and Lubuk Linggau (Firmansyah, 2015).

Ogan Ilir district is known for its ownership and conservation of Batanghari Sembilan art, namely in the Muara Kuang District. This sub-district is the sole region in Ogan Ilir that still preserves Batanghari Sembilan art. The Muara Kuang sub-district contains a branch of the Ogan Ilir Education and Culture Service, which is responsible for the preservation and conservation of cultural resources in the area. The Batanghari Sembilan song is commonly rendered during weddings or circumcision festivities as the inaugural performance of the occasion. The typical accompaniment instrument is typically a solitary guitar. However, in Rantau Sialang Village, additional instruments such as drums or dragonflies are also utilized. Meanwhile, in Munggu Village, the violin serves as the accompanying instrument. Six essential factors—the artist, musical instruments, songs, costumes and make-up, timing and location, and audience—improve the performance of the song Batanghari Sembilan.

#### Artisan

The Batanghari Sembilan rhythm performance often features a duo of artists, comprising a male and a female, in order to achieve a synchronized rendition. However, in Ogan Ilir Regency, a small group that consists only of a guitarist and a singer typically performs the song Batanghari Sembilan. The vocalist performs the nine Batanghari poems. During every performance, a single vocalist, one guitarist, and multiple dancers take the stage to execute the customary dance of the specific hamlet being referenced. It should be noted that whenever the song Batanghari Sembilan is performed in Muara Kuang District, Ogan Ilir Regency, dancers are always present, typically in an unusual quantity. All of the dancers are women. The event coordinator typically provides the dancers with traditional attire.

#### Instruments used to produce music

The Batanghari Sembilan rhythm in Muara Kuang District, Ogan Ilir Regency, is often performed using a solitary guitar and loudspeakers as the sound amplification device. Nevertheless, certain individuals employ the violin and amalgamate percussion rhythms and individual guitar performances in their musical execution. Regrettably, the violin has fallen out of use due to the song artist's decision to no longer sing, resulting in the discontinuation of the performance of the song Batanghari Sembilan with the violin.

Musical composition

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The songs featured in each rendition of the Batanghari Sembilan rhythm are tailored to the specific location and context of the performance. The lyrics of the Batanghari Sembilan beat are typically expressed in local dialects. The lyrics are subject to frequent modifications to align with the current occasion. Despite the constant variation in lyrics, the rhythm of the solitary guitar strum remains consistent. The repertoire of songs performed at wedding parties will vary from those played at circumcision celebrations and guest reception events.

#### Attire and Cosmetics

The event organizer supplies the attire utilized for the Batanghari Sembilan musical performance. Artists typically opt for suitable attire, such as fitted shirts or kebayas, even if there is no dress code specified for the event. The dancers don traditional attire from South Sumatra and enhance their image with facial make-up.

#### Date and Location of Performance

The Batanghari Sembilan rhythm is commonly played during wedding ceremonies, circumcision celebrations, and receptions for the regent or governor. During a wedding or circumcision party, the Batanghari Sembilan rhythm is employed as the inaugural ceremony, followed by subsequent events.

#### Audiences

The audience is the entity that derives pleasure and observes the performance of the song Batanghari Sembilan. The viewers comprised both invited guests and members of the public who saw the performance of the song Batanghari Sembilan.

The lyrics of the Batanghari Sembilan song, a regional song, are directly based on the state or condition of society. The lyrics usually contain messages about life through advice, humorous stories, guest remarks, love stories, or aspirations that you want to convey to the government. The following are several examples of lyric fragments in the song Batanghari Sembilan:

Lyrics in the form of advice for circumcision parties

Selaseh tumbuh di gunong (Basil grows on the mountain)

Mase nak di kapak untuk ditanam, (still on the ax to be planted)

Kase dulur de tinggila mak guno, (family love as high as a mountain)

Kase umak bapak sepanjang zaman. (Parental love throughout the ages)

Lyrics of a welcome to the regent as well as conveying aspirations

Buah duku masak dibatang (Ripe duku fruit on the stem)

Buah rambutan masak di tunjang (Ripe rambutan fruit on a branch)

Dusun Munggu ngucapke selamat datang (Munggu Village welcomes you)

Pada pak bupati serta rombongan (To the regent and his entourage)

Kayu jati bagus diukir (Nice carved teak woo)

Diukir dengan tali rumpia (Carved with neat rope)

Jadi bagus la Ogan Ilir (So it's good, Ogan Ilir)

Berkat pimpinan pak Mawardi Yahya (Thanks to Mr. Mawardi Yahya's leadership)

Segale pinte nak tekabul gale (All wishes will be granted)

Tinggal menunggu kupe dan care (Just waiting for Kupe and Cara)

Segala pembangunan la sude merate (All development has been evenly distributed)

Kantor desa Munggu yang belum ade (Munggu Village Office, which does not yet exist)

(House building made of bricks Bangunan huma dai batu bate

(Planted basil stems) Ditanam tanaman batang selaseh

Segale bangunan la sude merate (All buildings are evenly distributed)

Kami ucapkan terime kasih (We would like to express our gratitude)

Batang kandis berupe pakis (Kandis stems are ferns)

Pakis la tumbo di pinggir ugan (Ferns are already growing on the edge of Ogan)

Tembangan kami hamper nak habis (Our song is almost finished) Tolong maafkan jangan dilupakan (Please forgive, don't forget)

Despite its uniqueness and inclusion of moral themes, the Batanghari Sembilan Tembang Art in Muara Kuang District is currently encountering issues due to the lack of enthusiasm among the younger generation, who are meant to carry on this cultural tradition. The explanations for the difficulties in studying the arts, including playing the guitar, singing, and writing poem lyrics, as well as the belief that it is not relevant to contemporary developments, are several. In addition, the song Batanghari Sembilan is consistently accompanied with another problem. Engaging in this art may potentially accelerate the aging process in young individuals, leading them to assume the appearance of elderly women or unmarried men.

However, it is important to note that the veracity of this claim has not been substantiated via scientific investigation. Regrettably, a significant number of individuals continue to have beliefs regarding this matter and display a hesitancy to acquire knowledge in this discipline. Given these circumstances, it is imperative to make endeavors to revive and ensure the continuity of the Tembang Batanghari Sembilan art form for future generations to save this cultural heritage. According to Akmal and Darmawan's research (Akmal, A., & Widayati, 2021), language and the environment are closely interconnected in social life. They found that this connection plays a crucial role in preserving and perpetuating culture across generations. This includes not only cultural products, but also the process of disseminating them (Sibarani, 2015; Vansina, 1995)

#### Attempts to Revive the Batanghari Sembilan Tembang Tradition

Extensive research has been conducted on endeavors to revive regional culture, such as Nugrahani's investigation, which explores the revival of Javanese Dolonan songs within the framework of shaping national identity. The Javanese rhythm Dolanan, being a cultural heritage, is supported by nine pillars of national character, and therefore requires re-actualization in order to ensure its long-term sustainability. In addition, Enggarwati's research (Enggarwati, 2013) on the realization of Pacitan wayang beber also demonstrates the necessity of re-actualizing the Pacitan wayang beber culture, which is one of the cultures in Pacitan Regency, in order to prevent it from being supplanted by external cultures. Diverse approaches have been used, including the establishment of a Pacitan geopark, production of souvenirs, reception of visitors through the Pacitan wayang beber tradition, provision of cultural and art studios, creation of wayang beber batik, and revitalization of puppeteers. Triwardani and Christina's research (Triwardani & Rochayanti, 2014) focuses on the execution of policies aimed at transforming cultural villages into tourist destinations. Jemmain's research (Jemmain, 2011) investigates the role of Pappaseng values in the formation of national character.

In relation to this study, various stakeholders including artists, traditional leaders, the government, the Department of Education and Culture, and the community have made efforts to preserve and promote the art of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan. These efforts have involved the participation of these parties in preserving and introducing the Tembang Batanghari Sembilan culture at charitable events. To get additional details, refer to Table 1 provided below:

Tabel 1. Actors Involved in the Reactualization of Batanghari Sembilan

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No.	Actors Involved in the Reactualization of Batanghari Sembilan	Reactualization Efforts
1.	Batanghari's nine song artists	<ol> <li>Invite the public to learn to play the song Batanghari Sembil privately and for free after performing it.</li> </ol>
	Batanghari Sembilan  Batanghari's nine song artists  1.  2.  Department of Education and Culture  1.  2.  Officials in Muara Kuang District  1.  2.  Public Society	<ol><li>Record the song Batanghari Sembilan as a cassette tape that c be played when the developer or guitarist cannot be present the day.</li></ol>
2.	Department of Education and Culture	<ol> <li>One school, one studio program at primary to secondary les schools</li> </ol>
	Department of Education and Culture	2. Establishment of cultural housing in each sub-district located Lebak Seruo Tanjung Senai
		<ol> <li>School-level competition to welcome the Independence Day of t Republic of Indonesia</li> </ol>
3.	Officials in Muara Kuang District	Encourage the public to perform the Batanghari Sembilan song every charity event, whether a wedding or circumcision.
		<ol><li>Competition to welcome the independence day of the Republic Indonesia at the sub-district level.</li></ol>
		<ol><li>Perform the song Batanghari Sembilan as a welcome to the rege and governor who come to Muara Kuang District.</li></ol>
4.	Public Society	Following the sub-districts recommendation to perform the so
		Batanghari Sembilan at weddings and circumcisions.

Source: Primer Documentation

Multiple actualization endeavors are being undertaken:

# **Exhibited During Wedding Ceremonies and Circumcision Celebrations**

The Muara Kuang District Government advises the entire community to include the song Batanghari Sembilan in every wedding or circumcision event. The Muara Kuang District government is collaborating with the traditional institutions in each village as part of this endeavor. Currently, the sub-district government has not implemented any specific regulation or policy regarding the performance of the Batanghari Sembilan rhythm at marriages or circumcision rituals. At present, these suggestions are sent back to the community, allowing individuals to decide whether or not to showcase them. Upon its presentation, the spectators exhibited many responses, including laughter and tears.

#### Presented as a Salutation to the Regional Head

The Batanghari Sembilan song is commonly employed to greet local authorities visiting Muara Kuang District, including governors and regents. This serves as an introductory exploration of the indigenous culture specific to Muara Kuang District, with the aim of safeguarding and perpetuating this cultural heritage. During this event, the community had the opportunity to express their hopes and dreams through the words of the song Batanghari Sembilan, which was composed just for this purpose.

#### **Program for Unifying Schools and Studios**

The Ogan Ilir Regency Government, in collaboration with the Education and Culture Service, has initiated a program called "one-school, one-studio" with the aim of safeguarding and revitalizing the cultural heritage of the Ogan Ilir region. The government will assess and analyze the outcomes of the cultural festival program, scheduled to take place at the end of 2018. The festival is a local competition held at the sub-district level to exhibit the cultural heritage of each locality in Ogan Ilir. Every sub-district is required to send a representative, thus, any sub-district that fails to do so will be assessed for determining the causes that

led to this non-compliance. The Ogan Ilir Regency Government is discussing the establishment of a housing complex that encompasses the cultural aspects of each region within the Ogan Ilir Regency, such as arts, culture, and traditional attire. The discussion is intended to be established in the Lebak Seruo Tanjung Senai region. Under the one school, one studio initiative, each school is inherently engaged in the promotion and conservation of Ogan Ilir culture.

### Contest to Celebrate the Independence Day of the Republic of Indonesia

As part of the celebration of Indonesia's independence day, various competitions are held in the Muara Kuang sub-district. The competition encompasses several cultural practices found in every hamlet within the Muara Kuang sub-district, including traditional dances, Batanghari Sembilan songs, and more. The competition commenced in the education domain, namely inside schools. Once the school-level phase concluded, it proceeded to the sub-district level. Following the competition, there will be entertainment offered on the evening of August seventeenth, and the victors will receive awards. The victors will subsequently serve as representatives of the Muara Kuang sub-district and compete in district and provincial championships in their respective fields.

## Preservation Through the Use of Cassette Recordings

Some communities in the Muara Kuang sub-district lack Batanghari Sembilan song singers. Consequently, these villages solely depend on recorded cassettes to provide music during weddings and circumcisions.

Batanghari Sembilan artists are offering a free opportunity to learn about Batanghari Sembilan rhythms through an invitation.

The invitation was directed towards the general public, with a particular emphasis on the younger generation, immediately following the presentation of the Batanghari Sembilan rhythmic art.

# Significance of the Revival of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan

The shift in societal mindset towards modernity influences alterations in the prevailing social patterns pertaining to the Batanghari Sembilan song in South Sumatra. From a social perspective, this re-actualization also has consequences for the cultural aspects of society, encompassing thought patterns, beliefs, and notions about culture, including the substance of culture, such as art.

The re-actualization of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan was consciously undertaken by individuals inside the cultural system, resulting in an indirect transformation of people's perspectives, notions, and understanding of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan up until now. Moreover, material culture also reveals ramifications. This is evident through the modifications made in endeavors to conserve traditions and heritage. This research uncovered empirical data regarding the socio-cultural dynamics of society, which were manifested through the re-enactment conducted by the individuals involved.

The results of this study validate the theoretical concepts proposed by Sanderson, which assert that sociocultural evolution encompasses multiple dimensions and hence exhibits various directional patterns. An adaptive trait is one of the features of socio-cultural evolution. Sanderson argues that socio-cultural evolution is an adaptive outcome of diverse and fluctuating circumstances. Society will evolve to accommodate various emerging demands and requirements, including the presence of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan. Nevertheless, society is not perpetually confronted with novel wants and requirements.

Under static circumstances, prevailing sociocultural patterns are adequate for resolving essential human issues, rendering evolutionary change unnecessary. Both will manifest contingent upon whether the fundamental prerequisites for human existence and civilization undergo alteration or persist unaltered.

According to this view, the re-actualization of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan is a sociocultural evolution resulting from the increasing complexity of society. Nevertheless, socio-cultural evolution is characterized by its adaptability as society adjusts itself to accommodate shifting circumstances. This actualization is also an indication of society's adaptive response to change.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The influence of globalization cannot be detached from the underlying culture of society, including the regional culture of South Sumatra, specifically Tembang Batanghari Sembilan. This study demonstrates the imperative of safeguarding and conserving the art of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan as a cultural heritage, ensuring its continuity through the active involvement of the younger generation. Regrettably, the younger generation increasingly disassociates itself from and exhibits diminished enthusiasm in this art form. One of the reasons is

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that the art of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan is antiquated and considered responsible for the spinsterhood of older women.

This research additionally demonstrates that shifts in individuals' perspectives have resulted in the functional actualization of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan, with one notable factor being the inclusive disposition of the key stakeholders, including art activists, the government, and local communities. Hence, this endeavor to bring about actualization has significant ramifications for the cultural fabric of society, including cognitive processes, perceptions, and notions pertaining to culture, including its associated concerns.

Hence, this study also offers recommendations for conserving the art of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan by employing many musical instruments that can captivate the new generation's enthusiasm for acquiring this art while maintaining its authentic components. In addition, it is crucial to foster comprehension and acquire knowledge within the family in order to introduce the art of Tembang Batanghari Sembilan at a young age. This will also help address the misconception that being an unmarried woman of advanced age is undesirable, by presenting scientific data that can debunk this notion.

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