

NGELUKAT: AN ECOCRITICISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM STUDY IN THE LIFE TRADITION OF THE OSING COMMUNITY, BANYUWANGI

*(Ngelukat: Studi Ekosastra dan Aktivisme Lingkungan dalam Tradisi Kehidupan
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Abstract: *This study examines the tradition of ngelukat, particularly the selapanan ritual, within the Osing community of Banyuwangi through the perspectives of ecocriticism and environmental activism. The research focuses on the representation of the tradition in the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival (BEC) 2025 and the actual implementation of selapanan in Secang Barat Village. Using a qualitative approach that integrates oral traditions, ecocriticism, and environmental activism, this study analyzes the symbolic meanings and socio-cultural functions of the ritual. The findings reveal that selapanan is not merely a life-cycle rite but a complex cultural text. The ritual functions as a medium for transmitting cultural, spiritual, and ecological values through oral narratives, mantras, and symbols in ritual offerings. From an ecocritical perspective, the use of natural elements such as water, flowers, and soil reflect the harmonious relationship between the Osing community and their environment, underscoring the ecological wisdom embedded in local culture. In conclusion, the selapanan tradition represents a form of cultural green activism that unites spiritual, aesthetic, and ecological sustainability dimensions. This study recommends that the local wisdom within this tradition can serve as a foundation for addressing contemporary environmental issues while preserving the cultural identity of the Osing people amidst modernity.*

Keywords: *Cultural Green Activism; Ecocriticism; Ngelukat; Osing Community; Selapanan Ritual*

A. INTRODUCTION

The Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival (BEC) 2025 showcases the cultural representations of the Osing community through costume creations inspired by the practice of *ngelukat*. In Osing tradition, *ngelukat* refers to an important activity within the cycle of life that involves various human events, particularly within the Osing community of Banyuwangi, such as *mitoni* (the seventh-month pregnancy ritual), *selapanan* (the 35th-day baby ritual), *mudun lemah* (the ritual of placing a baby on the ground for the first time), circumcision (*koloan*), engagement (*perang bangkat*), and marriage (*kawin colong*). Each of these stages embodies social, spiritual, and ecological values that shape the collective identity of the Osing people. Through artistic representation in the form of costumes and ornaments, the festival functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for reviving these cultural practices in the public sphere.

The presence of *ngelukat* in BEC 2025 evokes a collective memory of cultural activities that have been or are still practiced within the community. Thus, the festival serves as a bridge between orally transmitted traditions and modern forms of representation that are more visually and artistically engaging. Among the series of *ngelukat* practices, *selapanan* in Secang Village, Kalipuro District, Banyuwangi, remains one of the rituals actively performed by the community and is rich in symbolic values. This practice reflects the close relationship between humans, nature, and spirituality that underpins the worldview of the Osing people.

To comprehensively interpret the meaning of *selapanan*, this study employs a combination of oral tradition, literary studies, ecocriticism, and environmental activism. Oral tradition provides a framework for exploring speech forms and inherited symbols. Literary studies allow the unveiling of aesthetic values and cultural messages embedded in the ritual. An ecocritical perspective facilitates the analysis of human–environment relations in the practice of *selapanan*, while environmental activism directs the reading toward ecological awareness and sustainability efforts expressed through tradition. In this way, the study not only examines the Osing tradition from a cultural perspective but also highlights its relevance to contemporary environmental issues.

The research problem is focused on the interconnection between culture, oral tradition, and ecology in the Osing community. Specifically, the study addresses three key points: first, the representation of *selapanan* tradition in the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival 2025; second, the meaning and function of *selapanan* in Secang Village, Kalipuro, within the framework of literature and oral tradition; and third, a reflection on the Osing community’s relationship with the environment through the perspectives of ecocriticism and environmental activism. Accordingly, the study aims to establish *selapanan* as a cultural practice that not only possesses aesthetic and spiritual significance but is also highly relevant within the discourse of ecological sustainability.

The objectives of this study are aligned with the stated research problems. First, it seeks to examine in depth the representation of *selapanan* tradition in the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival 2025, in order to understand how this cultural practice is staged and interpreted within the context of a modern festival. Second, it aims to explore the meaning and function of *selapanan* in Secang Village, Kalipuro, by situating it within the framework of literature and oral tradition as a medium for transmitting cultural values and spirituality within the Osing community. Third, it seeks to analyze the interconnection between *selapanan* and the Osing people’s relationship with their environment, through the perspectives of ecocriticism and environmental activism, to demonstrate the role of this tradition in maintaining ecological balance while simultaneously strengthening cultural identity.

B. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to interpret the symbolic meanings, social functions, and representations of the *selapanan* tradition in the Osing community, particularly as presented in the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival 2025.

1. Research Approach

The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it is appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of cultural practices, with an emphasis on the meanings, functions, and values embedded behind the symbols and narratives of the *selapanan* tradition.

2. Data Sources

Data were obtained through participant observation and in-depth interviews with village elders, cultural practitioners, and local residents. The primary data consisted of direct observations of the *selapanan* procession, while the secondary data came from literature related to folklore, semiotics, and ecocriticism.

3. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques in this study were carried out through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and literature review. Participant observation was used to record in detail the procession, symbols, prayers, mantras, and mythological stories passed down orally (Spradley, 1980). In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to explore knowledge, symbolic meanings, and the socio-cultural functions inherent in the *selapanan* practice. Meanwhile, the literature review was conducted by examining works related to folklore, oral tradition, semiotics, and ecocriticism as the theoretical foundation for analyzing field data (Danandjaja, 2002; Endraswara, 2016).

4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study was conducted through a combination of several theoretical approaches. First, folklore studies were used to understand the educational, solidarity, and cultural validation functions contained in the *selapanan* tradition (Bascom in Endraswara, 2016). Second, semiotic studies, drawing on the thoughts of Barthes and Eco, were employed to interpret both the denotative and connotative meanings of the ritual symbols present in the *selapanan* procession. Third, ecocriticism and ecolinguistics were applied to read this tradition as both a cultural text and an ecological text that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. This approach also enabled the researcher to uncover the potential of *selapanan* in fostering ecological awareness within the community (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Stibbe, 2015; Endraswara, 2018). Thus, the data analysis emphasized not only aesthetic and symbolic aspects but also opened broader insights into the interrelation of oral tradition, culture, and ecology.

5. Data Validity

Data validity was maintained through technique triangulation (observation, interviews, and literature review) as well as source triangulation by comparing information from various informants and references.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The *selapanan* practice in Secang Barat Village, Kalipuro District, Banyuwangi, is one of the *ngelukat* traditions consistently preserved by the Osing community. This ceremony is held when a baby *reaches* 35 days old (*selapan*), marking the child's acceptance into the community's social and spiritual life. As a ritual connecting humans with ancestors, the environment, and religious beliefs, *selapanan* is conducted at the family home and led by the village elder, cultural leader, or *Paraji* (traditional birth attendant) who is knowledgeable in prayers and ritual procedures. Preparations begin the day before, with symbolic offerings such as yellow sticky rice (a symbol of safety and blessing), *pecel pitik* and *kerawu* (symbols of sacrifice and prayers for health), and various sticky rice cakes like *awug*, *lepet*, and *lemper* (symbols of kinship and abundance). Five types of flowers—rose, jasmine, *kenanga*, tuberose, and *kantil*—represent the five daily prayers, symbolizing the fragrance of faith, while *damar kambang* (floating resin lamp) serves as a light and protector from darkness. Baby items, such as white clothing or simple patterned cloth (*jarik*), along with tools for hair cutting, are also prepared, reflecting the balance between material and spiritual dimensions in the ritual.

The *selapanan* procession begins with prayers and mantras in the Osing language mixed with Old Javanese vocabulary, recited by the *Paraji*, showcasing the historical layers of oral tradition preserved across generations. These prayers contain wishes for health, longevity, and protection for the baby. Afterward, a flower bath ritual is performed, symbolizing purification and the beginning of new life, followed by the cutting of the baby's hair. The cut hair is placed inside a young coconut and either buried in the yard or floated down a river, symbolizing the release of negative traits and affirming the child's bond with nature. The baby's mother also undergoes a similar purification ritual led by the *Paraji*, marking the restoration of physical and spiritual balance after childbirth. During the procession, elderly women sing Osing *tembang* or *kidung* containing prayers for safety, moral advice, and ancestral stories, serving as an educational medium and a vessel for collective memory. Uniquely, in Secang Barat Village, *selapanan* is often integrated with the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid Nabi*), where the recitation of *maulid* and the chanting of *mahalul qiyam* accompany the hair-cutting ritual, reflecting the acculturation of Osing local culture with Islamic traditions, enriching its spiritual significance.

Selapanan carries not only individual but also profound social dimensions. The ritual involves active community participation through collective preparation, food sharing, and

communal dining after the ceremony, thereby strengthening social solidarity and the communal bonds characteristic of the Osing people. Spiritually, *selapanan* is believed to function as a medium of purification and a channel for connecting with ancestors and the surrounding environment. The ritual use of water, flowers, earth, and fire symbolizes cosmic balance while teaching the principle of interdependence between human survival and environmental sustainability. Thus, *selapanan* in Secang Barat Village is not only a family ritual but also an expression of cultural identity, religiosity, and ecological awareness that remains relevant in today's context.



Figure 1 Selapanan Ritual

Clockwise: flower water and bathing tools for the baby, offerings for the *selapanan* ritual, *pecel pitik* and *kerawu*, food served for the guests, *damar kambing* and other required elements in the *selapanan* procession, the *Paraji* carrying the baby who has been bathed and massaged.

Analysis of the *selapanan* practice in Secang Barat Village, through the integration of folklore, oral tradition, semiotics, and ecocriticism perspectives, reveals the complex meanings embedded in this tradition. From a folklore perspective, *selapanan* serves educational, cultural legitimization, social control, and community unification functions, in line with Bascom's theory (1965). The presence of offerings such as yellow sticky rice, *pecel pitik*, and sticky rice cakes not only symbolize prayers and abundance but also affirm the Osing cultural identity rooted in agrarian values and local religiosity. The community's active participation strengthens social solidarity, while the *kidung* and ancestral stories performed act as educational tools that instill moral values.

Through the lens of oral tradition, *selapanan* has proven to be a medium of intergenerational knowledge transmission. The prayers and mantras chanted by the *Paraji* in Osing language interspersed with Old Javanese vocabulary demonstrate the continuity of oral tradition preserved across generations (Vansina, 1985; Danandjaja, 1984). The adaptation of this tradition through integration with *maulid* recitations and *mahalul qiyam* chants illustrates a dynamic acculturation between local culture and Islamic values, while also showing the ability of oral traditions to respond to changing times without losing their cultural essence.

From a semiotic perspective (Barthes, 1977), each element in *selapanan* carries denotative and connotative meanings that form a coherent system of signs. Yellow sticky rice is not merely food but a symbol of safety; the five kinds of flowers represent the completeness of worship as well as the fragrance of faith; while *damar kambang* symbolizes spiritual illumination and protection. The ritual of hair-cutting, followed by burying the hair in the yard or floating it down the river, is not only understood as the release of negative traits but also symbolizes the reintegration of human beings with natural elements.

Through an ecocritical approach (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996), *selapanan* is revealed as a cultural practice that embodies profound ecological awareness. The use of natural elements such as water, flowers, and soil in the ritual is not merely symbolic but reflects the Osing community's worldview that regards humans as an integral part of the ecosystem. The practice of floating the baby's hair and using locally sourced materials for offerings demonstrates an ethic of sustainability aligned with the principles of ecophilosophy. Furthermore, this tradition can be read as a form of culture-based environmental activism (Buell, 1995), in which ecological values are transmitted through a living and continuously preserved cultural practice.

Overall, this multidisciplinary analysis shows that *selapanan* is not merely a life-cycle ritual but a *living cultural text* that preserves philosophical, social, and ecological values relevant to contemporary contexts. This tradition not only functions as a custodian of Osing cultural identity but also offers a perspective of local wisdom in responding to modern challenges, including environmental crises and social disintegration. The continuity of *selapanan* in Secang Barat Village thus serves as tangible evidence of how local traditions can function as sources of both cultural and ecological resilience.

D. CONCLUSION

The study of the *selapanan* practice in Secang Barat Village, Kalipuro District, shows that this tradition not only functions as a customary ritual marking a baby's 35th day of age, but also as a cultural text rich with symbolic, religious, and ecological meanings. *Selapanan* has proven to be a space for the transmission of values through folklore, prayers, songs, and myths, thereby strengthening the continuity of oral tradition in society.

From a semiotic perspective, ritual elements such as offerings, clothing, and the hair-cutting procession represent safety, purity, and the baby's attachment to its social environment. Meanwhile, the ecocritical dimension in this tradition underscores the ecological awareness of the Osing community through the use of natural elements, which function not only as ritual media but also as symbols of spiritual interconnectedness with the environment.

Thus, *selapanan* can be understood as a cultural practice that integrates social, spiritual, and ecological values at once. This tradition is not only important to preserve as cultural heritage but also relevant as a medium of eco-spiritual reflection that bridges the relationship between culture, spirituality, and environmental activism in facing contemporary global challenges.

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