

STRENGTHENING CITIZENSHIP LITERACY THROUGH SINTREN ARTS CULTURE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY IN SEMEDO VILLAGE, TEGAL REGENCY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of sintren art in strengthening civic literacy in Semedo Village, Tegal Regency. In the context of modernization and globalization, civic values tend to degrade, especially among the younger generation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study examines the form of Sintren performances, the civic values contained within them, and their impact on citizen awareness. Data collection techniques used observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that sintren performances can be an educational tool rich in national values such as mutual cooperation, active participation, tolerance, and preservation of local culture. Therefore, sintren art can be used as an alternative strategy in building strong civic character

Keywords: civic literacy, arts culture, sintren

1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with astonishing diversity. The motto “Bhinneka Ika” (Unity in Diversity) has been known for a long time. The diversity of Indonesian traditions is a wealth that not all nations in the world possess. Based on article 32, paragraph 1 of the 1945 constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, the state advances Indonesian national culture among world civilizations by ensuring the community’s license to maintain and preserve its cultural values. In accordance and preserve its cultural values. In accordance with this, Indonesia is a country with the largest local cultural assets in the world (Suparno et al., 2018). Indonesia is a superpower in the field of culture, this is recorded by BPS (Central Statistics Agency), population counts in 2021 recorded that Indonesia has many ethnic groups totaling 1,300 and has 2,500 languages and cultural heritage assets, both in the form of objects and non-objects (Anatasya et al., 2023).

While diversity makes the Indonesian nation strong, it also presents challenges in maintaining unity. National cultural identity is increasingly threatened by the dominance of foreign cultures in modern times. This has the potential to divide the nation and destroy nationalism. Indonesian nationalism is born from the cultural diversity of each region, so it cannot be denied that Indonesian culture is fundamentally derived from the acculturation of local cultures. Understanding appropriate cultural practices has been proven to encourage a region’s people to develop distinctive characteristics and positive character, which fosters national character.

Current problems in Indonesia are influenced by the low level of understanding among Indonesian citizens. Meanwhile, globalization has impacted the existence of multiculturalism in Indonesia. Civic values are often sidelined by the dominance of foreign cultures, which tend to erode local identities. Many of these issues have been revealed, including research by Baharuddin (2017), which revealed that the shift in societal habits is caused by habits that reflect Western culture. A survey conducted by Populix shows that 65% of people in Indonesia have experienced a decline in enthusiasm for nationalism among young people, especially Gen Z or Generation Z aged around 11-26 years (Sulistya & Pratiwi, 2023)

This is where civic literacy plays a crucial role in maintaining national unity. The application of civic literacy is an effort to resolve national problems, especially among adolescents who are easily influenced by Western culture. The application of civic literacy focuses on the process of developing

citizens who are capable of addressing national issues and contributing to national and state life. Therefore, according to the definition, civic literacy is the skill of understanding the rights and obligations of citizens (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). Civic literacy teaches the importance of citizens' rights and obligations to protect and preserve the nation's culture. Cultural riches such as language, art, traditions, and local beliefs represent components of a nation's distinct identity. Culture is a valuable legacy from our ancestors that must be protected and preserved.

One local culture that exists in certain communities is the Sintren art form, a traditional dance whose preservation is maintained in Java. Sintren art is popular among the northern coastal communities, namely Central Java and West Java. This traditional dance has its own regional identity. Sintren became known in the 1940s. The word sintren comes from the name of the young female dancers who perform this traditional dance (Munasifah, 2023). Sintren has its own uniqueness in this area, Sintren art performances are often held at various events, such as traditional ceremonies, village celebrations, weddings and performance tours around the Semedo Museum, Kedungbanteng District, Tegal Regency.

The distinctive feature of Sintren is not only focused on the dance movements, but also on the magical elements that accompany them. In a Sintren performance, there is a certain procession that involves mantras and traditional musical instruments such as drums and flutes. Sintren dancers are believed to be in a state of trance during the performance, so their dance movements appear so flowing and captivating the audience. Based on Kudo Bekso Utomo's performance (23/6/2018) in Linggo Asri Village, Pekalongan, the flow of the Sintren performance is divided into 3 stages. The first stage is the strains of gamelan to invite the audience to gather. The second stage is the preparation by the Sintren shaman and his assistants when the Sintren dancers, accompanied by four female accompanying dancers, dance while circling the area. The third stage is the Sintren dancers in action, in a state of unconsciousness changing into three costumes in a small bamboo chicken coop with both hands tied with rope (Asmarani, 2019).

According to Mr. Madroji, chairman of the Mekar Arum Sintren Arts Association (February 12, 2025), the dances in Sintren art contain mystical nuances, because Sintren dances incorporate the influence of spirits. Misinterpretation of this mystical aspect can have fatal consequences. Furthermore, Mr. Slamet, Head of Semedo Village (February 12, 2025) said that Sintren art in Semedo Village is still part of the local culture that is preserved from generation to generation. However, as it develops, public interest in this traditional art has begun to decline due to the rapid flow of modernization and a lack of understanding of civic values. In fact, Sintren is not just entertainment, but also contains civic values such as cultural identity, mutual cooperation, and local wisdom.

The results of research by Musadad et al. (2023) stated that various local wisdom values were found in Sintren dance performances, including artistic values including dance sessions, foam art, make-up art, make-up art, social values, religious values, economic values, and can accommodate the human resource economy. This indicates that Sintren contains various values, such as religious values reflected in the prayer ritual before the performance, as well as social values that emphasize the importance of maintaining bonds of brotherhood and mutual respect. Therefore, this study is interested in analyzing the role of Sintren art in strengthening civic literacy. This study aims to understand how Sintren art can instill civic values while preserving cultural heritage. Therefore, it is hoped that this research can provide strategies for developing culturally based civic literacy.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research will use a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is based on an inductive mindset, focusing on objective observation through direct involvement in the social phenomena being studied (Abdul Hadi et al., 2021). Specifically, this research is more directed towards applying descriptive methods, namely research that defines or describes events that the researcher can capture, by presenting actual data. Understanding these events can be based on the researcher's skill and commitment to investigating an event in order to obtain factual information (Abdussamad, 2021).

The research procedures include: pre-research stage, research work stage, and data analysis stage. The research data sources include primary and secondary data, with data in the form of words and actions, written sources and photographs. The research data collection techniques used interviews, observation, documentation, and triangulation. Data analysis used qualitative analysis using the Miles

and Huberman interactive model analysis technique, including the following activities: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Mahardhani, 2022).

3 Results

This article discusses 3 (three) subtopics, including: 1) Performance Forms in Sintren Arts; 2) Sintren Arts Values in Strengthening Civic Literacy; 3) The impact of Sintren arts in strengthening civic literacy

3.1 Performance Forms in Sintren Arts

Beginning of the Performance

According to field notes from April 27, 2025, the Sintren performance began with the preparation of various necessary props, such as musical instruments, offerings, costumes, and so on. The procession then began with the shaman burning incense. This was confirmed by an interview with MA (TA/4/27/2025). Before the performance, the arts group worked together to prepare the venue, musical instruments, Sintren dancer costumes, and props such as cages and incense. Incense is believed to be a medium for conveying messages to the supernatural, as well as a form of prayer and a request for safety. After the incense is burned, the shaman recites a prayer while the prospective Sintren dancer sits in a sedeku position, carrying a tray containing dance equipment, including costumes, accessories, and makeup. The tray is placed on the prospective Sintren dancer's thighs. The shaman then brings the incense and holds it level with the prospective Sintren dancer's face. Prospective Sintren dancers inhale the aroma of incense with both hands raised above the incense as part of the initial ritual (MA/TA/27/4/2025).

The prospective sintren dancer, after a few minutes of bowing her head, shows a trance or unconsciousness response. Next, the shaman puts the prospective dancer into a cage as the next stage of the ritual. While reciting a mantra, the shaman then walks around the cage while carrying a lit incense. After walking around the cage, the incense is placed in front of the cage. Then, as an accompaniment to the sinden, music is played that sings a song to summon the spirits of the 39 angelic princesses, while the kepok number 40. These angelic spirits will magically wear the clothes of the prospective sintren dancer, this is intended to make the sintren dancer enter a trance state (MA/TA/27/5/2025). Furthermore, MI revealed that the accompaniment of magical musical lyrics is a summoning mantra, which is believed to facilitate the process of the descent of the widadari spirit so that it can enter the body of the Sintren dancer during this process: "The descendants of widadari, 40 ranjing maring sing dadi, Renteng-renteng turuna, Sing tak renteng, Mbakyu Sintren" (MI/27/5/2025).

Based on the results of field notes on April 27 2025. After a few minutes of the ritual process, the cage moved by itself as a sign that the sintren dancers were ready, so the cage had to be ready to be opened. After the handler released the cage, Sintren, who previously wore ordinary clothes, transformed into Anggun, wearing full dance clothes and adorning her face with make-up. Apart from that, Sintren dancers also wear sunglasses.

The core of the show

In this performance, the sintren invites the audience to dance along. The audience then enters the performance area and greets the sintren. The audience often gives the dancers money while dancing along as a form of appreciation and participation in the performance. With the melodies of the sinden and the gamelan accompaniment of the sinden, as well as the musicians playing the gamelan, the sintren dancers and the audience move in harmony with the rhythm of the music (MI/PK/27/5/2025).

A Sintren dance performance consists of a number of scenes that are not always presented systematically or sequentially, but rather according to the dancer's request. Each scene is first confirmed by the Sintren shaman, who then passes it on to the singer and gamelan musicians, considering that each scene has different characteristics, both in terms of the song and the form of the accompaniment (MA/TA/27/4/2025).

Based on the results of field notes on April 27, 2025, the core of the performance consists of several core scenes, namely: 1) Temoan (asking for donations), 2) Mungguh Kurungan (climbing

the cage), and 3) Inviting the audience to dance. The Temoan procession in the Sintren performance is carried out when the dancer, accompanied by the Sintren guard, circles the performance area while carrying a tray approaching the audience, with the aim of collecting support or voluntary donations as a form of audience participation (MI/PK/27/4/2025).

The results of field notes dated April 27, 2025, the second stage of the ritual, Sintren who previously wore kebaya clothes with jarik bottoms were then put into a cage carrying a tray containing bottom clothes of trousers and t-shirts. Next, the shaman brought incense and raised it parallel to the face of the prospective sintren dancers. In this procession, prospective sintren dancers inhaled the aroma of incense with both hands raised above the incense as part of the second ritual, then the dancers changed new clothes with t-shirts and pants as a form of adaptation to the dynamics of the performance.

This change of clothing has a functional purpose, namely to provide comfort and freedom of movement for the dancers, especially if there is a request from the audience for the Sintren to climb the cage. This procession is called munggah kurungan. The choice of simpler and more flexible clothing allows the dancers to continue to perform optimally without any movement constraints, while maintaining the smooth flow of the performance (MI/PK/27/04/2025). After successfully climbing the cage, the Sintren dancers will climb on top of it, accompanied by traditional song lyrics: Pitik walik kelisik, Munggah kurungan, Ijo rio-rio, Kaya penganten anyar (MI/PK/27/4/2025). Then invite the audience to dance. When the atmosphere begins to peak when the gamelan music sounds increasingly lively, accompanying the graceful movements of the Sintren dancers who seem to be lost in the rhythm. Slowly but surely, their steps approach the rows of audience, as if building a bridge between the world of performance and reality (based on the results of field notes on April 27, 2025). With slow movements, the dancers walk towards the crowd. The audience, who had been captivated by the dance, reached out to a male audience member sitting in the front row. They danced together. There was no specific choreography, just spontaneous movements born from the rhythm of the music and the spirit of togetherness (MI/PK/27/5/2025). During the Sintren performance, Sintren dancers were only permitted to perform movements without direct contact from the dancers. If this occurred, the dancers would lose consciousness. However, if the dancers first made physical contact by holding the hands of male audience members, the interaction would not have a negative impact on the dancers' condition (MI/PK/27/05/2025).

Closing

Based on the results of field notes dated April 27, 2025, at the end of the performance, the entire series of Sintren art processions were closed with the chanting of the song Sayonara sung by the sinden. This is confirmed by the MA statement that this song serves as a symbolic marker that the performance has reached the end of the event, as well as a form of farewell between the art group and the audience in the performance tradition. In the accompaniment of the song sung by the sinden, the shaman with the help of the sintren guard carries out the process of restoring the dancer's consciousness from the trance state. This process is carried out by putting the sintren dancer back into the cage, this time accompanied by a tray containing the daily clothes they had previously worn (MA/TA/27/4/2025). After the sintren dancer finishes dancing and is put back into the cage, the ritual procession does not immediately stop. The pawang, who is tasked with maintaining the ritual's spiritual course, then takes the burned incense and carefully places it right in front of the cage. After the Sintren dancers have finished changing their clothes inside the cage, assisted by angel spirits, the cage will appear to start to sway or move by itself (MI/PK/27/4/2025).

Based on field notes on April 27, 2025, after the shaman opened the cage, the sintren guard always immediately embraced the dancer who appeared weak and unconscious. The process of restoring consciousness from the trance state was continued by the kemlandang by wiping a cloth on the sintren dancer's face while reciting a certain prayer whose purpose was a spiritual effort to ask that the angel spirit believed to have possessed the dancer's soul immediately leave it, while returning the dancer to a state of full consciousness in everyday reality. This marked the end of the trance state (MA/TA/27/4/2025).

3.2 Sintren Arts Values in Strengthening Civic Literacy

Based on field notes dated April 27, 2025, in the Sintren performance, spiritual values are certainly one of the main aspects taught through prayers recited before the performance begins. This is crucial for the performance to run smoothly. Sintren also teaches the value of mutual

cooperation. Starting from the preparation of the performance, the implementation, and after the event is finished, everything is done collaboratively. This is also confirmed by MA's statement, prayers are important during the performance, all members of the Sintren arts are involved. In addition, during the Sintren performance, the Sintren arts group arrives on time before the performance begins. Based on this, the arts group learns that every right is always accompanied by obligations, as well as the importance of maintaining commitment in joint activities. This is the value of discipline and responsibility. Sintren also becomes a space that reflects the value of diversity because the diversity of social backgrounds, ages, and roles involved in each performance shows that this art is open to anyone who has a passion for cultural preservation (MA/TA/27/4/2025)

Based on field notes on April 27, 2025, some of the members of the Sekar Arum arts group are young people, who play the role of drummers and sintren dancers. The younger generation has a responsibility to preserve the sintren arts so that they do not become extinct over time. However, the sintren arts have not collaborated with formal educational institutions, but in performances there are definitely children and teenagers who watch. Thus, indirectly, sintren becomes a contextual learning medium regarding the history, customs, and local culture of the region (MA/TA/27/4/2025). So even though it does not directly teach Civics like in formal schools, through the sintren arts, many important values have been instilled that shape individuals who understand their rights and obligations as citizens, care for others, and love their homeland and national culture. Sintren is not only a cultural heritage, but also a means of character education and citizenship that lives in the community (MA/TA/27/4/2025). EH also clarified that Sintren art can be a non-formal educational tool for fostering civic awareness. This is because Sintren contains many cultural and social values that can indirectly educate the public (EH/M/8/5/2025).

From the results of interviews with MA, each interesting Sintren art performance, namely the process of possession by the dancer, also contains educational and social values because through the story or narrative that is raised involving mythical figures of angel princesses who possess the dancers, the Sintren performance conveys moral and ethical messages (MA/TA/27/4/2025). Moral and ethical values include educational values for the younger generation, for example, Sintren dancers who are still girls or virgins who can play Sintren so that the angel princess will enter the body of a dancer. In this way, the character of an angel who is graceful and maintains self-respect becomes a symbolic example for women and society in general (MA/TA/27/4/2025). The value of democracy or deliberation is reflected when the audience is often invited to dialogue or provide input, for example, if there is an audience who expresses an opinion that there should be a sintren *naik kurungan* performance, then the artists agree to it, so that this tradition becomes a living medium of cultural democracy, where the voices of all parties are heard and respected, in addition, members of the arts group also hold discussions before the performance begins to design and agree on the course of the performance (MI/PK/27/4/2025).

The value of deliberation is also found in the fourth principle of Pancasila, as Indonesian citizens, we must behave, think, and act based on Pancasila. Pancasila is the foundation of the state and the ideology of the Indonesian nation, drawn from the noble values of culture and local wisdom of the archipelago. Therefore, the values in the sintren art that reflect the values of Pancasila include, as stated by the Supreme Court, that first, before starting a performance, there is a spiritual value. This is in accordance with the first principle of Pancasila, because before the performance there are prayers and rituals involving traditional figures to ask for permission and safety. The second principle, reflected in the sintren art, is the value of tolerance, as in sintren performances performed by female dancers in a state of trance, and the community respects this. There is no blaming or imposing views on one another; all can live side by side. The third principle, reflected in the value of mutual cooperation. In sintren performances, the community is usually involved, both in preparing the venue, preparing food, and some even help voluntarily. This not only reflects the value of togetherness, but also strengthens the culture of democracy in community life (MA/TA/27/4/2025). The fourth principle, seen during the decision-making process in the Sintren performance, is often discussed together among members of the arts group. And also received encouragement to preserve this Sintren art with the full support of the village government and the entire community, which was expressed in the Tourism Studio Group (Pokdarwis) meeting forum at the Semedo Village Head's Office, where the community clearly proposed that the preservation of this art involve beautiful young players who are also the next generation. The fifth principle, reflected in the Sintren art, is seen in Sintren performances because this art can be enjoyed by all groups, without differentiating social or economic status. Anyone can watch, help, and even be part of the performance. There is no distinction between rich or poor, all are involved equally (MI/PK/27/4/2025).

It is the duty of Indonesian citizens to preserve local cultural arts. This is reflected in the participation of the Samedo village community in preserving the Sintren art form, which is quite good, although it still needs improvement. Residents, especially elders and artists, actively maintain this tradition. The village government also continues to encourage the survival of this art form, for example by involving local arts groups in various village activities (S/KD/8/5/2025). Sintren serves as a medium for strengthening the cultural identity of the village community. Sintren is seen by the community as not just a traditional art form, but also a symbol of identity and pride for the Samedo village community. Sintren depicts distinctive local values in accordance with civic values. When the community, through the preservation and performance of Sintren, learns not only about art but also about their civic identity as part of Indonesian culture. Sintren also serves as a unifying medium. During performances, residents from various backgrounds, both local and outside the village, gather, interact, and build a sense of togetherness. This moment is very important in fostering a sense of nationalism (S/KD/8/5/2025).

Therefore, the role of Sintren art in helping preserve national values and local culture is an important medium for maintaining national identity and local culture. During performances, people gather and interact with each other, helping each other in preparation—all of which are forms of preserving national values rooted in local wisdom. Sintren also serves as an indirect educational platform. Through its performances, people are introduced to the history, myths, and philosophy of life of the Javanese people. These values are crucial for strengthening self-identity as part of the diverse, yet united, Indonesian nation. By continuing to preserve Sintren, we are also preserving a cultural heritage that has become part of the nation's personality. Therefore, it is crucial for the community to continue to preserve and pass on this art to their children and grandchildren by inviting them to watch Sintren art performances (A/TM/8/5/2025). As Indonesian citizens, it is necessary to love the culture of our country. In this way, Sintren can strengthen a sense of love for the homeland or national identity.

3.3 The Impact of Sintren Arts in Strengthening Civic Literacy

Based on field notes on April 27, 2025, the Sintren art form, as a local culture, is a source of pride for the people of Samedo village. The community showed high enthusiasm during the performance. This was immediately apparent, as audience members danced on stage and offered donations. When the dancers, accompanied by Sintren guards, circled the performance area to collect donations, residents voluntarily contributed money as a form of support. The performance was peaceful and harmonious, reflecting a spirit of togetherness and tolerance among residents towards local culture. Furthermore, some residents also asked for blessings through Sintren prayers, believed to originate from angelic spirits, which were performed using water and chanted with certain mantras.

Through the Sintren arts, the community not only learns about art, but also about the identity of the Samedo village community as part of Indonesian culture. Sintren also serves as a unifying medium. When there is a performance, residents from various circles, both from within the village and from outside the village, gather, interact with each other, and build a sense of togetherness (S/KD/8/5/2025). This statement was confirmed by (A/TM/8/5/2025), if the Sintren performance every Sunday at Langeng Market, Samedo Village, is indeed a medium for gathering and interaction between residents, even residents from outside Samedo village also gather and interact with each other, residents enthusiastically watching the Sintren performance. However, for every day in the village environment, it does not become a gathering medium because now the Sintren arts group has become its own community. This means that the Sekar Arum Sintren arts are not a broad forum for the community but only for that one group, but communication and interaction between residents is still well maintained.

Until now, art and religion are often considered two separate things, when in reality they have the potential to support each other. Sintren art contains universal values such as sincerity, discipline, and respect for parents, values that align with religious teachings and national principles. In the context of social life, Sintren serves as a bridge that strengthens relationships between residents, creates harmony, and fosters a love for the homeland. The harmony and mutual respect that grow from this cultural process are an important part of the realization of good citizenship values (A/TM/8/5/2025). Community involvement in the preservation of Sintren art in this village remains quite strong. Many residents, especially the older generation and artists, are still active in this art activity. From a civic literacy perspective, seeing that there are important

values taught through the preservation of Sintren, the community learns to appreciate differences, preserve cultural heritage, and actively participate in social and cultural activities. This indirectly raises awareness of the rights and obligations of being a good citizen (S/KD/8/5/2025).

Sintren art can be an effective means of conveying civic messages. As a society that lives and grows alongside this tradition, the public sees sintren as a medium that strengthens the values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and respect for tradition. These values are highly relevant to civic principles, such as mutual respect, concern for the social environment, and preserving national identity. Furthermore, because sintren is performed in public spaces and directly involves the community, the messages embedded in the performances are easily understood and accepted by the public.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Performance Forms in Sintren Art. Sintren is a traditional performance that serves as a link between the human world and the supernatural. A virgin girl as a Sintren dancer is believed to be possessed by an angel, causing her to dance in a state of unconsciousness. This trance process is the core of the performance and creates a strong spiritual nuance. The shaman plays a crucial role in directing the ritual and ensuring the continuity of the procession according to tradition, accompanied by gamelan music that enhances the magical atmosphere. Sintren has ritual and social value, often performed in traditional ceremonies to seek blessings and protection. Each element, such as movement, costume, and offerings, has symbolic meaning that reflects the beliefs of the community. Despite adaptations to modern entertainment needs, Sintren retains its mystical essence and cultural identity.

The Values of Sintren Art in Strengthening Civic Literacy. Sintren art presents the richness of local culture, which is full of civic values, such as spirituality, mutual cooperation, tolerance, democracy, and social justice. This performance not only conveys values theoretically, but also practices them in the social life of the community. As the cultural identity of Semedo Village, Sintren helps shape the character of residents who uphold diversity and deliberation. Sustainability shows that culture can adapt without losing its noble values. Thus, Sintren becomes an effective educational tool in strengthening civic literacy based on local culture in accordance with the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

The Impact of Strengthening Civic Literacy through Sintren Arts. Sintren, as a medium for strengthening civic literacy, can build the values of mutual cooperation, solidarity, tolerance, cultural identity, spirituality, and love of the homeland through contextual cultural practices. The involvement of people across generations and communities demonstrates Sintren's role in building inclusive social interaction spaces and strengthening social bonds. Sintren performances also serve as an effective non-formal educational tool in instilling Pancasila values and shaping the character of active citizens. However, the lack of systematic integration of Sintren into formal education presents a challenge. Therefore, collaborative efforts are needed between educational institutions and village governments to develop participatory and contextual local culture-based educational models to strengthen civic awareness and responsibility.

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