



SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURAL VALUES IN NIAS FOLKLORE: AN ETHNOPEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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KEYWORD

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the symbolic representation of cultural values in Nias folktales from an ethnopedagogical perspective. It aims to identify and interpret cultural symbols embedded in folktales and to explore their pedagogical functions within the oral tradition of the Nias community. This research employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design and content analysis method. The data were derived from three selected Nias folktales, namely *Ono Namada Rajo Si Da Siwa*, *Rajo Same Amania ba Lubo Danö*, and *Tuhenöri Same Ononia Khö Si Lumana*, collected through interviews with folklore informants in Fanayama District, South Nias. The findings reveal that Nias folktales embody various cultural values through symbolic representations. Gold symbolizes social honor, a small bird represents self-control, a pit in the ground signifies intergenerational relational conflict, and a watermelon symbolizes wisdom and intellectual challenge. Furthermore, the transformation from the inscription “My Greatness” to “God’s Power” reflects religious awareness and humility. Fishing nets and coastal huts symbolize hard work and simplicity. These symbols function not only as narrative elements but also as vehicles for transmitting moral, social, and spiritual values. From an ethnopedagogical perspective, Nias folktales serve as a cultural educational medium that preserves and transmits local wisdom across generations. This study highlights the relevance of folktales as a culturally grounded learning resource in the context of globalization.

INTRODUCTION

Folklore is an important part of cultural heritage that represents the identity, knowledge system, and outlook of life of a society. Danandjaja (2007) explained that folklore is part of a collective culture that is inherited from generation to generation, both verbally and through examples accompanied by gestures. As part of oral literature, folklore not only serves as entertainment, but also as a medium for the transmission of cultural values, norms, and knowledge between generations. In the context of the Nias society, folklore has an important position as part of the collective memory and the guidelines of the social life of the community. Rosliani (2015) stated that Nias folklore is the spirit of community life and has an important role in various aspects of the life of the Nias people. Folklore also contains various cultural messages that are inherited through characters, plots, symbols, and conflicts in the narrative so that folklore cannot be separated from the cultural life of the supporting communities. Folklore as a cultural product represents social norms, customs, and a certain people's view of life. Endraswara (2013) stated that folklore not only functions as public entertainment, but also as a medium of cultural education and the inheritance of social values. Sulistyorini (2024) explained that folklore and cultural rituals function as a medium for transmitting social heritage, cultural learning, and

moral and ethical inheritance for the younger generation. Cultural values in folklore basically represent man's relationship with God, nature, society, other humans, and himself (Djamaris in Yulistio & Nugroho, 2023). These values are manifested through cultural symbols that shape people's way of looking at life.

Schefold (1995) explained that the culture of the Nias people has a strong relationship with the symbols, rites, and traditional value systems of their people. Cultural symbols have an important function in building a system of community meaning. Geertz (1973) explained that cultural symbols shape the ethos and outlook on life of people through a socially inherited system of meaning. In folklore, symbols are not only an aesthetic element of the narrative, but also a representation of cultural values that contain moral, social, and philosophical meanings of the supporting society. Hall (2013) states that representation is an active process in building meaning through certain languages, symbols, and cultural codes. Therefore, the meaning of cultural values in folklore needs to be carried out through symbolic interpretation of the social and cultural context of the society that gave birth to it.

In this study, cultural symbols are understood as signs or objects that contain collective meaning in people's lives. Cultural symbols not only serve as narrative elements in folklore, but also represent certain socially inherited cultural values. Therefore, the symbolic meaning of cultural values is interpreted as an interpretation of cultural symbols that represent the view of life, norms, morals, and belief systems of the Nias people.

On the other hand, the development of globalization and digital culture has caused oral traditions to be increasingly marginalized in modern society. The lack of documentation and the disconnection of speaker regeneration are a serious threat to the sustainability of the transmission of cultural values and messages in folklore. Koentjaraningrat (2015) explained that cultural change can occur through innovation, diffusion, acculturation, and assimilation that affect society's value system. As a result, folklore is slowly losing its social and educational function as a medium of community cultural education, even though folklore has great potential as a source of education based on local culture.

From an educational perspective, folklore can be understood through an ethnopedagogical approach. Ethnopedagogy is an educational approach that utilizes local culture and wisdom as a source of learning to instill cultural values and build community character. Sugara and Sugito (2022) explain that ethnopedagogy aims to foster awareness of cultural identity through the learning process based on local culture. Thus, Nias folklore is not only important as a cultural heritage, but also relevant as a pedagogical medium in community cultural education in the midst of globalization challenges. This research offers an interpretive approach based on symbolic representation and ethnopedagogy to understand Nias folklore as a medium of community cultural education.

Research on cultural values in folklore has been done before. However, most research still focuses on identifying moral values and folklore structures in general without linking symbolic representation to the pedagogical function of community culture. Studies that specifically discuss the symbolic representation of cultural values in Nias folklore from an ethnopedagogical perspective are still relatively limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the symbolic representation of cultural values in Nias folklore and reveal the ethnopedagogical function of folklore as a media for community cultural education. The novelty of this research lies in the effort to connect the symbolic representation of cultural values in Nias folklore with its ethnopedagogical function as a medium for the transmission of local knowledge and community cultural education. This research is expected to contribute to the development of folklore, cultural representation, and ethnopedagogy, as well as emphasize the relevance of oral traditions in cultural education in the global era.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of ethnographic research. A qualitative approach is used because this research focuses on the meaning of cultural symbols and the representation of cultural values in Nias folklore through an ethnopedagogical perspective. The object of the research is in the form of cultural symbols, cultural values, and pedagogical functions contained in Nias folklore, while the subject of the research is the narrative of Nias folklore obtained from the folklore informants of the Nias people. The

research informants were selected purposively based on the criteria as folklore resource persons, namely understanding Nias folklore, having heard or inheriting stories from generation to generation, and being able to retell folklore in the cultural context of their community. The source of the research data consists of three Nias folktales, namely *Ono Namada Rajo Si DaSiwa* (The Story of the King with Nine Children), *Rajo Same Amania ba Lubo Danö* (The King Who Threw His Father into a Pit of Earth), and *the Story of the Village Leader Who Marries His Son to the Poor*. The collection of data sources will be carried out in 2026 in the Fanayama District area, South Nias.

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself (*human instrument*) assisted by interview guidelines, observations, documentation, and data classification sheets to identify cultural symbols, cultural values, and ethnopedagogical functions in folklore. Data collection techniques are carried out through in-depth interviews with folkloric informants, listening, recording, and recording techniques on the narratives of folklore spoken by informants. The transcribed data is then analyzed using *content analysis techniques* with stages: (1) transcribing and understanding the entire folklore narrative, (2) identifying cultural symbols that appear in stories, (3) classifying the representation of cultural values based on the social and cultural context of the Nias people, (4) interpreting the ethnopedagogical function of cultural symbols in community cultural education, and (5) drawing conclusions based on patterns symbolic representations found. The interpretation of symbolic meaning in this study is carried out based on the cultural context of the Nias community, the results of interviews with folklore informants, and the relationship of symbols with the social value system of the supporting community. The validity of the data is carried out through source triangulation and theoretical triangulation by comparing the results of interviews between informants and using cultural, folklore, and ethnopedagogical representational perspectives in the data interpretation process.

RESULTS

Based on the data analysis, the results of the research were found which have been summarized in the analysis guide table below.

Table 1. Guide to Analysis of Symbolic Representations of Cultural Values in Nias Folklore: An Ethnopedagogical Perspective

Yes	Cultural Symbols	Folklore Data Quotes	Symbolic Meaning	Representation of Cultural Values	Ethnopedagogical Functions
1	Gold	<i>“siapa pun yang memiliki simpanan emas yang banyak akan memperoleh nama, kehormatan dan kedudukan, di tengah masyarakat”</i> (ONRSDS, paragraf 2)	Symbols of honor and social status	Dignity and social recognition of society	Social responsibility education
2	Traditional houses	<i>“Mereka berkumpul di dalam rumah adat dan mulai memukul-mukul emas”</i> (ONRSDS, paragraf 4)	Symbols of collective cultural space	Togetherness and collective work	Social and cultural education
3	Small birds	<i>“ada seekor burung kecil yang terus-menerus berkicau”</i> (ONRSDS, paragraf 5)	Moral warning sound symbol	Self-awareness and alertness	Self-control education
4	Bird sounds	<i>“Bunyi burung itu membuat pekerjaan yang seharusnya teliti</i>	Symbol of the test of human emotions	Patience and emotional control	Character education

5	Gold is ruined	menjadi kacau” (ONRSDS, paragraf 6) “Akhirnya, karena kemarahan dan ketidaksabaran itu, pekerjaan menempa emas justru berantakan” (ONRSDS, paragraf 7)	Symbols of emotional failure	Prudence and self-control	Moral education
6	Old father	“Sulta selalu menyuruh ayahnya menjauh dan bersembunyi” (RSABLD, paragraf 3)	Symbols of the old generation and tradition	Respect for parents	Intergenerational relations education
7	Ground holes	“menggali sebuah lubang di tanah” (RSABLD, paragraf 4)	A symbol of social isolation	Moral crisis and loss of respect	Social ethics education
8	Protective roof	“membuat atap di atasnya agar ayahnya tidak kehujanan” (RSABLD, paragraf 5)	Symbol of the remnant of moral responsibility	Children's moral ambivalence towards parents	Family moral education
9	Watermelon	“Ada orang asing yang menantangku menebak jumlah biji dua buah semangka” (RSABLD, paragraf 8)	Wisdom test symbol	The importance of knowledge and experience	Life wisdom education
10	Dad's advice	“janganlah membuang orang tua. Engkau akan membutuhkan nasihat orang tua suatu saat nanti” (RSABLD, paragraf 11)	A symbol of traditional wisdom authority	Appreciation for life experiences	Family values education
11	Watermelon seeds	“tujuh biji untuk yang besar dan tiga biji untuk yang kecil” (RSABLD, paragraf 10)	Symbols of hidden knowledge	Local wisdom of the community	Cultural intellectual education
12	The Words "My Greatness"	“tertulis: ‘Kehebatanku’” (TSOKSL, paragraf 6)	Symbol of human pride	Criticism of social arrogance	Moral education
13	The Scriptures "The Power of God"	“Kini tertulis: ‘Kekuatan Tuhan’” (TSOKSL, paragraf 9)	Symbol of the transformation of religious consciousness	Religiosity and humility	Spiritual education
14	Fishing nets	“Hartanya hanya sebuah jaring ikan” (TSOKSL, paragraf 3)	Symbol of the struggle of life	Hard work and simplicity	Survival education

15	Huts on the beach	“Rumahku hanya gubuk, kita di tepi pantai” (TSOKSL, paragraf 4)	A symbol of socio-economic limitations	Humility and struggle	Social empathy education
16	The collapse of greatness	“yang mereka sebut ‘kehebatan’ bisa runtuh, tetapi kuasa Tuhan dapat mengangkat orang yang dijatuhkan” (TSOKSL, paragraf 11)	A symbol of human limitations	Religiosity and humility	Spiritual and moral education

*Story Abbreviation Caption

ONRSDS = *Ono Namada Rajo Si Da Siwa*

RSABLD = *Rajo Same Amania to Lubo Danö*

TSOKSL = *Tuhenöri Same Ononia Khö Si Lumana*

Representation of Symbols of Honor and Self-Control in *Ono Namada Rajo Si Da Siwa*

The results of the study show that the folklore of *Ono Namada Rajo Si Da Siwa* represents the value of social honor and self-control through dominant cultural symbols. One of the main symbols in this folklore is gold.

“Siapa pun yang memiliki simpanan emas yang banyak akan memperoleh nama, kehormatan dan kedudukan, di tengah masyarakat.” (Whoever has a large deposit of gold will gain a name, honor and position, in society.)

The quote shows that gold in Nias society is not only interpreted as a material object, but also as a symbol of social dignity and legitimacy of one's position in society. Gold ownership represents collective respect and social recognition. Thus, the gold symbol shows that the people of Nias view honor as an important part of socio-cultural life.

In addition to gold, the symbol of the traditional house also appears as a representation of the collective cultural space. It is seen in the following quote.

“Mereka berkumpul di dalam rumah adat dan mulai memukul-mukul emas.” (They gathered inside the traditional house and started beating gold.)

The traditional house in the quote is interpreted as a symbol of the socio-cultural space of the community. The gold forging activities carried out together show the value of collectivity and social work in the culture of the Nias community. Traditional houses not only function as a physical place, but also as a space for the inheritance of cultural values and social interaction of the community.

Another dominant symbol in this folklore is the small bird that keeps chirping during the process of forging gold.

“Ada seekor burung kecil yang terus-menerus berkicau.” (There's a little bird that is constantly chirping.)

The small bird is interpreted as a symbol of moral warning and self-control. The sound of birds that continues to be heard becomes an emotional test for the characters in the story. Their impatience then caused the gold-forging work to fail.

“Akhirnya, karena kemarahan dan ketidaksabaran itu, pekerjaan menempa emas justru berantakan.”
(Eventually, because of that anger and impatience, the work of forging gold fell apart.)

The quote represents the cultural values of patience, prudence, and self-control. This folklore teaches that uncontrolled emotions can damage one's work and honor. In an ethnopedagogical perspective, the symbol of the bird and the broken gold serves as a medium of character education that teaches emotional control and social responsibility in people's lives.

Representation of Symbols of Wisdom and Intergenerational Relations in Rajo Same Amania ba Lubo Danö

The folklore of *Rajo Same Amania ba Lubo Danö* represents intergenerational relationships through cultural symbols related to parents, wisdom, and life experiences. One of the main symbols in this folklore is the earthen pit.

“menggali sebuah lubang di tanah.” (dig a hole in the ground.)

The pit is interpreted as a symbol of social isolation from the older generation. The act of putting the old father in the pit indicates a moral crisis and a loss of respect for the parents. This symbol represents a change in social relations in a society that has begun to ignore traditional sources of wisdom.

However, this folklore also shows that the older generation is still seen as a source of knowledge and life experience.

“Janganlah membuang orang tua. Engkau akan membutuhkan nasihat orang tua suatu saat nanti.”
(Don't throw away your parents. You will need parental counsel someday.)

The quote shows that parents are represented as a symbol of wisdom and moral authority in Nias society. The life experience of the older generation is seen as an important source of knowledge in solving life problems.

In addition, the watermelon symbol and its seeds also have a strong symbolic meaning. It is seen in the following quote.

“Ada orang asing yang menantanku menebak jumlah biji dua buah semangka.” (There was a stranger who challenged me to guess the number of seeds of two watermelons.)

Watermelon in this folklore is interpreted as a symbol of the test of wisdom and cultural intelligence. The challenge of guessing the number of watermelon seeds shows that traditional knowledge of the community is seen as a form of intelligence that is passed down from generation to generation.

“Tujuh biji untuk yang besar dan tiga biji untuk yang kecil.” (Seven seeds for the big one and three for the small one.)

Watermelon seeds represent hidden knowledge and precision of thought. This symbol shows that the people of Nias value meticulousness, experience, and the ability to think as part of cultural values. In an ethnopedagogical perspective, folklore serves as a medium of moral education regarding respect for parents, the importance of life advice, and appreciation for traditional wisdom.

Representation of the Symbol of Religiosity and Humility in Tuhenöri Same Ononia Khö Si Lumana

The results of the study show that the folklore of *Tuhenöri Same Ononia Khö Si Lumana* represents the value of religiosity and humility through cultural symbols related to spiritual awareness and people's life struggles. One of the main symbols in this folklore is the inscription "My Greatness".

“*Tertulis: ‘Kehebatanku’.*” (It is written: 'My greatness'.)

The writing is interpreted as a symbol of human arrogance and belief in one's own strength. This symbol represents a cultural critique of arrogance and social superiority. However, the symbol later underwent a change.

“*Kini tertulis: ‘Kekuatan Tuhan’.*” (Now it is written: 'The power of God'.)

The change in writing represents the transformation of human consciousness towards religiosity and humility. The people of Nias in this folklore view that the success of life does not only come from human ability, but also from the power of God.

In addition, the symbol of fish nets and huts on the beach also represents the struggle of the life of small communities.

“*Hartanya hanya sebuah jaring ikan.*” (His treasure is only a fishnet.)

Fishing nets are interpreted as a symbol of the hard work and survival of coastal communities. This symbol shows that a simple life does not take away the value of one's honor in society.

“*Rumahku hanya gubuk, kita di tepi pantai.*” (My house is just a shack, we're on the beach.)

The shacks on the beach represent socioeconomic limitations and simplicity of life. However, this folklore actually shows that humility can give birth to constancy, hard work, and religious awareness.

Thus, Nias folklore not only functions as folklore, but also as an ethnopedagogical medium that transmits the moral, social, religious, and cultural values of the community through cultural symbols that are inherited from generation to generation.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that Nias folklore represents the cultural value of the community through cultural symbols that contain ethnopedagogical functions. These symbols not only function as narrative elements in folklore, but also as a medium for transmitting social, moral, religious, and cultural values that are inherited from generation to generation in the Nias society. The findings of this study show that Nias folklore functions as a cultural education system for the community through symbolic representations that live in oral traditions.

The discovery of the gold symbol in the folklore of *Ono Namada Rajo Si Da Siwa* shows that the people of Nias view honor and social status as an important part of the cultural structure of society. Gold is not only understood as a material object, but also as a symbol of social dignity and cultural legitimacy. This finding is relevant to the view of Geertz (1973) who stated that cultural symbols are a system of meaning that people use to understand their social life. In the context of Nias folklore, gold is a cultural symbol that represents the value of honor and social recognition of the community. In addition, the symbol of the traditional house in the folklore shows that the cultural space of the Nias people functions as a center of social interaction and inheritance of cultural values. This finding is in line with Harefa (2017's) research which shows that the Nias traditional house not only functions as a place to live, but also as a socio-cultural space for the community.

The symbol of the small bird and broken gold in the folklore of *Ono Namada Rajo Si Da Siwa* represents the value of self-control and patience. The sound of birds that interfere with the process of forging gold is interpreted as a human emotional test. The impatience of the characters causes the forged gold to be damaged. These findings show that Nias folklore contains character education that teaches emotional control and prudence in action. In an ethnopedagogical perspective, cultural education is not only conveyed through direct advice, but also through symbols and cultural narrative experiences. This finding is relevant to the

ethnopedagogical concept put forward by Alwasilah (2009) that the local wisdom of the community can be a source of character education and cultural education.

In the folklore of *Rajo Same Amania ba Lubo Danö*, the symbol of the pit represents the social isolation of the older generation. The symbol shows a crisis of respect for parents in intergenerational relationships. However, this folklore also shows that parents are still seen as a source of life wisdom through the symbols of the old father and his advice. These findings show that the people of Nias view the life experiences of the older generation as an important source of cultural knowledge in social life. The findings of this study support the view of Vansina (1985) that oral traditions function as a medium of inheritance of knowledge and collective memory of the community. In the folklore, the father's advice not only functions as an element of the story, but also as a form of transmission of moral values and social education of the Nias people.

The symbol of watermelon and its seeds in the folklore of *Rajo Same Amania ba Lubo Danö* also shows a representation of the cultural intelligence of the people. The challenge of guessing the number of watermelon seeds represents people's appreciation for the rigor of thinking, life experience, and traditional knowledge. These findings suggest that folklore contains not only moral education, but also cultural intellectual education. In the perspective of cultural representation, Hall (1997) states that cultural symbols function as a medium of production and exchange of meaning in society. Therefore, the watermelon symbol in Nias folklore is not only understood as a physical object, but as a representation of the knowledge and cultural wisdom of the community.

Meanwhile, in the folklore of *Tuhenöri Same Ononia Khö Si Lumana*, the symbols of the inscriptions "My Greatness" and "The Power of God" represent the transformation of human consciousness from pride to religiosity. The change in the symbol of the writing shows that the people of Nias view the success of life not only from human ability, but also from the power of God. These findings show a relationship between cultural values and people's spiritual awareness in Nias folklore. The symbol also shows that folklore functions as a medium of moral and spiritual education for the community. The findings of this study are relevant to the research of Zebua (2020) which shows that Nias folklore contains religious values and moral education inherited through oral traditions.

In addition, the symbol of the fishing nets and huts on the beach represents the hard work, simplicity of life, and social resilience of small communities. The symbol shows that the people of Nias view hard work and perseverance in life as important cultural values. In an ethnopedagogical perspective, these symbols function as a medium of social education that teaches survival and simplicity to generations of society. These findings show that Nias folklore not only maintains the cultural identity of the community, but also transmits the value system of life through cultural symbols that live in oral traditions.

Overall, the results of the study show that Nias folklore represents the cultural value system of the community through cultural symbols that contain ethnopedagogical functions. The symbols represent the values of honor, self-control, respect for parents, life wisdom, religiosity, hard work, and simplicity of life. The findings of this study show that Nias folklore not only functions as an oral literary heritage, but also as a medium of community cultural education that transmits social, moral, and spiritual values through cultural symbolic representation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Nias folklore represents the cultural value system of the community through cultural symbols that contain ethnopedagogical functions. Cultural symbols in folklore not only function as narrative elements in folklore, but also as a medium for transmitting moral, social, religious, and cultural values that are inherited from generation to generation in the Nias society. Based on the results of the analysis of the folklore of *Ono Namada Rajo Si Da Siwa*, *Rajo Same Amania ba Lubo Danö*, and *Tuhenöri Same Ononia Khö Si Lumana*, various cultural symbols were found that represent the values of honor, self-control, respect for parents, wisdom in life, religiosity, hard work, and simplicity of life.

The findings of the study show that the gold symbol represents the honor and social legitimacy of the Nias people, the symbol of the small bird and broken gold represents self-control and patience, the symbol of

the pit and the old father represent intergenerational relations and respect for the elderly, while the symbols of the inscriptions "My Greatness" and "The Power of God" represent the transformation of the religious consciousness of the community. In addition, the symbol of fishing nets and huts on the beach shows a representation of the hard work and survival of small communities in Nias culture.

The novelty of this research lies in the approach of symbolic interpretation of Nias folklore through an ethnopedagogical perspective. This research not only identifies cultural values in folklore, but also shows how cultural symbols in folklore function as a medium of community cultural education. Thus, this study shows that Nias folklore is a cultural education system that lives in oral traditions and has a pedagogical function in the formation of community character.

This research also contributes to the study of folklore, cultural representation, and ethnopedagogy, especially in seeing folklore as a medium for the transmission of symbol-based cultural values. In addition, this research can be a reference in the development of local cultural education, the preservation of regional folklore, and learning based on local wisdom in the educational environment.

Based on the results of the research, it is suggested that further research can develop the study of Nias folklore through a linguistic, semiotic, or performative study of oral traditions so that the cultural representation of the Nias people can be understood more comprehensively. In addition, Nias folklore also needs to be integrated in cultural learning and local literacy as an effort to preserve the cultural identity of the Nias people in the midst of globalization.

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