

THE SEMIOTICS OF *SANDUNG* AS A LOCAL CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE *HINDU KAHARINGAN* COMMUNITY IN PALANGKARAYA CITY

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Abstract

This study explores the semiotics behind the *Sandung* as a local cultural identity for the *Hindu Kaharingan* community residing in Palangkaraya City. *Sandung* is a designated repository for the bones of the died human being, the post-placement of bones is started through performing the *Tiwah* event. The laws and structural parts of *Sandung*, both direct and indirect, are carved in relief and ornamented with sculpture or pictures based on a variety of symbols linked to local wisdom. There are key symbols which have a philosophical significance that is further directly related to Hindu worship. The existence of *Sandung* encompasses interrelated concepts of art and religion, serving not only as a sacred place but also as an important marker of the local cultural identity of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya City. This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, employing data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, documentation, and relevant literature review. The findings indicate that *Sandung* as a cultural identity of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya City is divided into two aspects: the form and meaning of *Sandung* as a local cultural identity. The philosophical values contained within *Sandung* affirm its role as a cultural identity of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya City. Based on the analysis results, this research is expected to contribute and add to the knowledge for the preservation of the local culture of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya City.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Sandung, Local Cultural Identity, Hindu Kaharingan Community*

Introduction

Semiotics is the study of signs in society. Cultural semiotics focuses on analyzing signs within the context of culture to reveal cultural aspects. Cultural semiotics specifically examines the system of signs in societal culture. The division of signs into the signifier and the signified is an important concept in Saussurean semiotics, based on the idea that signs are arbitrary (Fanani, 2013). Through signs, humans understand symbols in the form of writing and objects, which need to be analyzed to become meaningful and have a clear function. The signs analyzed in this research are the signs present in *Sandung*.

Palangkaraya is a beautiful city in the province of Central Kalimantan. It is a cultural city where the distinctive Dayak art reliefs can be seen on government buildings, from fences, entrances,

nameplates, schools, and more. The traditions and culture of the Dayak people are highly characteristic, reflecting the strength of the art created through the carvings and engravings of local artists in Palangkaraya. Additionally, the local community deeply loves their regional art, which is evident in the artistic concepts applied to buildings such as houses, halls, and *Sandung*. The forms presented in *Sandung* are works of art that symbolize the identity of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya.

A *Sandung* is a small place used by the *Hindu Kaharingan* community to store the bones of deceased individuals that have been purified through the *Tiwah* ritual. These structures have roofs and pillars decorated with distinctive Dayak art. The architecture of a *Sandung* is very unique and characterized by Dayak ornaments.

The materials used to construct a *Sandung* are typically ironwood, although some are made of cement. According to *Hindu Kaharingan* beliefs, bones that have been cleansed through the *Tiwah* ritual are placed inside the *Sandung*. During the *Tiwah* ritual, the *Sandung* serves as a symbol of *sthana*, a place, and a home for the sacred spirits of the deceased, and it also acts as a link between the sacred spirits and their descendants. For the *Hindu Kaharingan* community, building a *Sandung* is a way to show devotion to deceased parents, implementing the values of *Tri Rna*, specifically the understanding of *Pitra Rna* (debt to ancestors), as well as remembering and continuing the noble traditions passed down by the parents to their descendants (Naro et al., 2023). Based on its form, a *Sandung* can be categorized into five types: 1) *Sandung Tunggal*, 2) *Sandung Kariring*, 3) *Sandung Keratun*, 4) *Sandung Raja*, and 5) *Sandung Munduk*. These types of *Sandung* are designated according to the circumstances of death, such as dying in an accident, being a religious figure during life, an official, and so on. The specific function can be identified by the number of supporting pillars present in the *Sandung*.

Identity is a marker of self, characteristics, and unique traits that should be maintained and inherited to ensure cultural traditions remain significant and valued as monumental legacies. Personal identity is the unique set of characteristics that distinguishes an individual, based on their self-perception. Identity relates to meaning as a symbol, representing one's sense of self.

Sandung symbolizes a sacred place and dwelling for the departed spirits who have undergone the *Tiwah* ritual, serving as a connection for their offspring and relatives. Through acts like prostration, rituals, prayers, and offerings performed by family members, communication takes place at specific times and occasions before the *Sandung*. According to *Hindu*

Kaharingan beliefs, these sacred spirits residing in the *Sandung* can offer guidance and direction to their descendants, serving as intermediaries and mentors on a spiritual level, and representing the identity of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community.

Sandung represents a unique cultural identity specifically for the *Dayak* culture, found only in Central Kalimantan, particularly in Palangkaraya. It exudes a local charm with its distinctiveness and is highly cherished by the populace. Serving as an emblem of cultural diversity in the realm of art, *Sandung* is adorned with ornaments reflecting the characteristic *Dayak* carvings portraying the flora, fauna, and natural elements of the Borneo jungle. Unraveling the profound meanings behind these intricate details requires in-depth analysis to grasp the true essence of the identity embraced by the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya.

Typically, residents of Palangkaraya are well-acquainted with *Sandung*, which holds significant reverence and sanctity among the *Hindu Kaharingan* adherents. Nonetheless, there are many generations who remain unfamiliar with and lack comprehension of the diverse forms of *Sandung*, along with its intended purposes and the philosophical significance it carries as a local cultural emblem in Palangkaraya.

Given the prevailing challenges, there's a call for research into the diverse manifestations of *Sandung* and its philosophical significance as a local emblem in Palangkaraya. Furthermore, an analysis of these *Sandung* forms from a semiotic standpoint is imperative.

The objective of this study is to investigate the different shapes of *Sandung* as a representation of local cultural identity in Palangkaraya, as well as to grasp the philosophical significance inherent in *Sandung* as a cultural symbol in the city.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research approach to explore the semiotics of *Sandung* as a cultural identity among the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya. Data collection involves methods such as observation, interviews, documentation, and literature review. Both secondary (from literature reviews in print and electronic media) and primary data (gathered through observation, interviews, and documentation) are utilized in this research.

Finding and Discussion

The shape and meaning of *Sandung* as a cultural emblem within the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya.

Sandung is a small place used by the *Hindu Kaharingan* community to store the human bones of the deceased, which have been purified through the *Tiwah* ritual. This building is characterized by a roof and pillars adorned with distinctive Dayak ornaments. Typically, *Sandung* is traditionally constructed using strong wood, locally known as "kayu ulin," esteemed for its strength and quality. However, due to challenges in sourcing high-quality wood and the prevalence of younger, inferior quality wood, there has been a transition to using cement in *Sandung* construction. Despite the shift in materials, *Sandung* structures typically maintain the distinctive architectural style of Dayak culture, with ornamental motifs reflecting Dayak characteristics throughout.

Based on the supporting pillars, *Sandung* can be categorized into different forms representing local cultural identities in Palangkaraya, such as:

1. *Sandung Tunggal*

Sandung Tunggal is a single-pillar *Sandung*. Its design is simple, shaped like a pyramid with a roof on top, and there's a hole covered with glass at the front. The ornamentation is unique, featuring relief

carvings of medicinal plants, *Balanga* (earthenware), the sun, the moon, and stars. It's typically smaller than other *Sandung* structures. *Sandung Tunggal* is designated for those who have died in accidents, drownings, and similar events. Originally crafted from *ulin* wood, it's now commonly made from cement as well. *Sandung Tunggal* represents an enduring local tradition and is a compulsory practice among the *Hindu Kaharingan* community. When a family member passes away due to an accident, it is customary as part of the *Tiwah* ritual to erect a *Sandung* with a single pillar.



Figure 1. *Sandung Tunggal*
source: <https://kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/bpcbaltim/Sandung-penguburan-suku-dayak/>

2. *Sandung Kariring*

Sandung Kariring is a *sandung* characterized by using two pillars, making it larger than *Sandung Tunggal*. It serves as a repository for the bones of individuals who held leadership roles and prominence in their fields during their lifetime, following the *Tiwah* ritual. While primarily crafted from *ulin* wood, *Sandung Kariring* is increasingly being constructed with cement. Its ornamental features include customary motifs such as the *piak liau* bird, *Balanga*, celestial bodies like the sun and moon, as well as specific indigenous ornaments like *asun bulau*, *bajakah lelek*, *pulang gayung*, *patung hatue*, and *kamberawit*.



Figure 2. *Sandung Kariring*, Source:
<https://www.suarakahayannews.com/mengenal-Sandung>

3. *Sandung Karatun*

Grave *Sandung Karatun* is larger than *Sandung Tunggal* and *Kariring*. It uses four pillars, intended as a container for human bones that have undergone the *Tiwah* ritual. Typically, this *Sandung* is used as a container within one family or one lineage. Most of the basic materials used are *ulin* wood but nowadays, many *Sandung* are also made of cement. The ornaments in this *Sandung* are very characteristic of Dayak identity with the same ornament standards as those in *Sandung Kariring*. Generally, the more successful during their lifetime will affect the ornament shape in *Sandung* during the *Tiwah* ritual, but still pay attention to the ornament standards that must exist in *Sandung*.



Figure 3. *Sandung Karatun* Source:
<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/300193131397423810>

4. *Sandung Raja*

Sandung Raja, with its six wooden pillars, typically serves as a repository for the remains of esteemed individuals or several individuals from the same lineage who have undergone the *Tiwah* ritual. These esteemed individuals are those who held significant leadership roles during their lives. *Sandung Raja*, being a substantial and imposing structure, signifies the *Hindu Kaharingan* community's deep appreciation for artistry and proficiency in artistic expression, evident in the elaborate carvings adorning its ornaments. Crafted primarily from *ulin* wood, *Sandung Raja* is now a rare find,

with only a few remaining, typically aged structures. Its ornaments, characterized by unique Dayak designs, adhere to specific guidelines, featuring elements such as the *piak liau* bird, *Balanga*, celestial bodies, *asun bulau*, *bajakah lelek*, *pulang gayung*, *patung hatue*, and *kamberawit* motifs, enhancing its elegance and aesthetic appeal.



Figure 4. *Sandung Raja* Source:
<https://kpskhk.org/Sandung-tempat-pemakaman-adat-suku-dayak-ngaju/>

5. *Sandung Munduk*

Sandung Munduk is the simplest type of *Sandung*, as it does not use pillars and is placed directly on the ground. Initially, all its materials were made of *ulin* wood, but nowadays, many are made of concrete. This *Sandung* is intended to store the bones of the deceased, as part of the *Tiwah* ritual procession. In terms of its appearance, *Sandung Munduk* is shaped like a cone with distinctive *Dayak* ornaments. Although it doesn't have pillars, the ornaments on *Sandung* still adhere to the standard requirements for the structure to maintain its sacredness and beauty.



Figure 5. *Sandung Munduk* Source:
https://id.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkas:Sandung_Munduk.jpg

The philosophical values inherent in *Sandung* serve as a manifestation of the local cultural identity of the *Hindu*

***Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya City.**

The existence of *Sandung* in Palangkaraya City is emblematic for the *Hindu Kaharingan* community, given that *Sandung* structures are deeply revered and inherited across successive generations. The *Tiwah* ritual, a cultural tradition, is viewed as an obligatory practice for the *Hindu Kaharingan* community, aimed at securing a favorable afterlife for the departed soul (*atma*). Among the culminating stages of the *Tiwah* ritual is the erection of *Sandung*, serving as a repository for the remains of those who have undergone the *Tiwah* ceremony.

Philosophical values represent beliefs regarding behavioural conduct, serving as guiding principles and life perspectives within society. Values, as per the objective logical approach, are realities observed from an ontological standpoint, yet they transcend space and time, constituting logical essences accessible through reason. In this context, values are responses offered by individuals as actors, their existence shaped by their experiences (Wibawa, 2013). Similarly, Cathrin (2021) also highlights the significance of religious and societal values, regarded as true and foundational to Indonesia, fostering societal progress since its inception (Cathrin et al., 2021).

Considering the processions and the shrine for ancestral spirits associated with *Sandung*, it is essential to examine the philosophical values embedded in *Sandung* as part of the local culture of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in Palangkaraya.

1. Aesthetic Value

The term "aesthetic" originates from the Latin word "*aestheticus*," which means "sensation" or "things that can be perceived by the senses." Aesthetics is also considered a branch of philosophy that discusses beauty, encompassing art and the universe. Etymologically, the word "aesthetic" means the study of beauty from the form of an object or the impulse and aesthetic experience of creating and observing the object. Aesthetics is a field of study that examines beauty, and standards of beauty in art have existed for a long time (Rachmawaty, 2013).

The ornaments on *Sandung* are created from the creativity of *Dayak* artists who illustrate the beauty of nature and the environment. Natural objects like *Bajakah Lelek* and *Pulang Gayung* are carved into *Sandung*, giving it artistic and philosophical value. *Bajakah* symbolizes prosperity, with its stem used as binding rope, which signifies the bonds of kinship to maintain harmony. Other *Sandung* ornaments also have aesthetic value with distinctive *Dayak* features: the carving of the sun symbolizes life, the moon symbolizes death, stars signify pure light, *Balanga* (a type of jar) symbolizes wealth, and the *piak liau* bird symbolizes the guardian of ancestral spirits. The aesthetic values in *Sandung* carry profound philosophical meanings as part of the cultural heritage of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in the city of Palangkaraya.

2. Social Value

Social values are the guidelines of a group concerning what is considered good and bad. Some characteristics of social values arise from interaction and are not innate. Social values originate from the need of a social group to establish measures that control the various desires of its members in different situations. These measures provide society with knowledge about morality, truth, and prohibitions (Gloriani, 2013). The social values reflected in the *Sandung* structure are evident through social interactions, both with family and

the community, during the construction of the *Sandung*, the *Tiwah* ritual processions and their sequences, and the preparation and placement of human bones. These interactions reflect an understanding of good things and efforts to avoid hurting others' feelings, ensuring the ritual process can proceed smoothly and successfully. One example of social interaction during the construction of *Sandung* is always speaking kindly and avoiding the use of harsh words.

3. Sense of Unity

Fostering familial bonds with a spirit of embracing differences among various elements and communities is the primary value of togetherness. In the construction of *Sandung*, unity is required both from family members and other assisting members of the community. The establishment of *Sandung* gains a positive image when families and the descendants of those being commemorated can maintain harmony and togetherness throughout the ritual. This sense of togetherness also helps strengthen familial ties, both within one's own family and with the surrounding community. For the people of Palangkaraya, the tradition of togetherness holds great value. In this regard, the people of Palangkaraya do not differentiate between family structures based on religious differences, but rather prioritize lineage. Togetherness has four components that must be owned and maintained by every member. They are careful, unselfish, humble, and willing to sacrifice. These four things are the first steps in building a sense of solidarity. (Darmanto, 2022) In undertaking any work, it is done collectively with a spirit of familial unity. This sense of togetherness serves as one of the defining aspects of the local culture in Palangkaraya.

4. Religious Values

Religious values are considered to have the strongest foundation of truth compared to

other values. The value of religious education is an indicator of understanding that contains the basics of religious teachings which originates and is based on the teachings of the sacred literature (Yasa, 2022) These values originate from the highest truth that comes from God. *Sandung* is a vessel, and its creation begins with a ritual process in accordance with the practices of the *Hindu Kaharingan* faith. Tradition and religion blend into a unified whole, fulfilling the duty of a child to their deceased parents by performing the *Tiwah* ritual and creating a *Sandung* to place the bones of their departed parents. From the beginning to the end of the process, religious rituals are carried out. At this stage, the conception of religious values becomes a belief and conviction for the families and followers of *Hindu Kaharingan* that what they are doing is a tradition born from religion, and that good karma will be obtained when the descendants can perform the *Tiwah* ritual and make a *Sandung* as a shrine for the pure spirit of their parents. Such religious values become an identity of the Hindu community's culture in the city of Palangkaraya.

Conclusions

Semiotics is a field of study that explores societal life. Cultural semiotics aims to analyze cultural elements, enabling its analysis to reveal aspects related to culture. A *Sandung* is a small place used by the *Hindu Kaharingan* community to store the bones of deceased individuals that have been purified through the *Tiwah* ritual. Based on its form, *Sandung* can be categorized into five types: 1) *Sandung Tunggal*, 2) *Sandung Kariring*, 3) *Sandung Keratun*, 4) *Sandung Raja*, and 5) *Sandung Munduk*. Philosophical values are beliefs about behavior that serve as principles and life perspectives within a community. In the construction of *Sandung* and its related activities, various values are present, including aesthetic values, social values, the value of

togetherness, and religious values. These forms and philosophical values serve as the cultural identity of the *Hindu Kaharingan* community in the city of Palangkaraya.

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