



#### ARTICLE

Submitted date : May 15<sup>th</sup> 2025

Revised date : June 16<sup>th</sup> 2025

Accepted date : July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2025

Correspondence Address:

Studi Etnomuskologi, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Mulawarman Indonesia

E-mail: chorhiez@gmail.com

## Music, Ritual, and Community Practice: An Applied Ethnomusicological Analysis of *Kelentangan Belian Namang* in Kedang Ipil's *Tepung Tawar* Tradition

**Ditha Adhany Fara Dila<sup>1\*</sup>, Aris Setyoko<sup>2</sup>, Agus Kastama Putra<sup>3</sup>**  
<sup>1,2,3</sup> Program Studi Etnomuskologi, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Mulawarman

#### Abstract:

This research highlights how applied ethnomusicology contributes to cultural preservation through the documentation of traditional music. By combining traditional ethnographic techniques with modern analytical tools, the approach respects indigenous knowledge systems while producing accessible materials for both academics and local communities. This hybrid method not only preserves cultural heritage but also strengthens its transmission to younger generations. The study also reveals the intricate dynamics between tradition and modernity within indigenous societies, where customary authorities, informal knowledge, and formal education intersect. These tensions reflect broader social changes and the challenges of maintaining cultural identity when traditional learning environments are disrupted. Applied ethnomusicology emerges as a valuable tool for both community development and cultural sustainability. Collaboration between researchers and communities results in resources that serve academic inquiry while reinforcing local cultural identities. This participatory method reflects the principle of reciprocity that underpins applied ethnomusicology. Moreover, the findings show that documentation alone is not enough. Effective cultural preservation requires adaptive strategies that actively involve local communities, promote intergenerational learning, and respond to contemporary realities without compromising cultural integrity. The study underscores both the resilience and the fragility of indigenous knowledge systems and calls for context-sensitive approaches to ensure their continued vitality.

**Keywords:** *Kelentangan; Belian Namang; Kedang Ipil; and Tepung Tawar*

### **Abstrak:**

Studi etnomusikologi terapan ini mengkaji peran integral musik *Kelentangan* dalam ritual *Belian Namang* yang dipraktikkan dalam tradisi *Tepung Tawar Kedang Ipil*. Penelitian ini mengulas bagaimana praktik musik tradisional berfungsi sebagai mekanisme vital untuk pelestarian budaya, kohesi sosial, dan kontinuitas spiritual dalam komunitas adat. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif deskriptif, investigasi ini menggabungkan observasi-partisipan, wawancara etnografis, dokumentasi audio-visual, dan analisis musik berbasis laboratorium. Pengumpulan data melibatkan kerja lapangan ekstensif, partisipasi langsung dalam upacara ritual, wawancara dengan spesialis ritual, dan dokumentasi komprehensif pertunjukan musik. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa musik *Kelentangan* memiliki empat fungsi utama: komunikasi (memfasilitasi dialog antara dunia spiritual dan material), representasi simbolik (mewujudkan nilai-nilai budaya dan kepercayaan kosmologis), validasi institusi sosial (memperkuat hierarki komunitas), dan kontinuitas budaya (memastikan transmisi pengetahuan leluhur). Analisis musikal lagu *Gendang Bujur* mengungkapkan ensemble canggih yang terdiri dari instrumen *Kelentangan*, *Gendang Panjang*, Gong, dan *Penyalit*. Kerangka melodi beroperasi dalam skala pentatonik (E-Fis-G-A-B) dengan F sebagai pusat tonal, mencakup rentang dari E hingga B. Analisis statistik menunjukkan dominasi nada F (27 kemunculan), diikuti E (12) dan B (6), menggunakan terutama interval unison dan kuint sempurna dalam formula melodi repetitif. Dari perspektif terapan, penelitian ini mendemonstrasikan bagaimana komunitas adat mempertahankan identitas budaya melalui praktik musik sambil menavigasi tantangan modernisasi. Studi ini menyediakan kerangka metodologis untuk upaya pelestarian budaya dan berkontribusi pada pemahaman peran multifaset musik dalam kehidupan sosial dan spiritual komunitas.

**Kata kunci:** *Kelentangan; Belian Namang; Kedang Ipil; dan Tepung Tawar*

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of applied ethnomusicology, the study of indigenous musical practices within their ritual contexts has emerged as a critical area of scholarly inquiry, particularly as communities worldwide grapple with the challenges of cultural preservation amid rapid modernization. The intersection of music, ritual, and community practice represents a complex web of cultural transmission, spiritual expression, and social cohesion that demands careful investigation by ethnomusicologists. This research contributes to the growing body of applied ethnomusicological literature by examining the *Kelentangan* musical tradition within the Belian Namang ritual of the Tepung Tawar ceremony in Kedang Ipil Village, demonstrating how traditional musical practices serve as vital mechanisms for maintaining cultural continuity and community identity.

The village of Kedang Ipil represents a fascinating case study for applied ethnomusicological research, as it maintains a rich tradition of ceremonial practices that integrate musical performance with spiritual and social functions. Among the most significant of these traditions is the Belian Namang ritual, performed within the broader context of the Tepung Tawar ceremony. This sacred practice embodies the community's deep connection to ancestral wisdom, spiritual belief systems, and collective identity.

The ritual activities present in Kedang Ipil Village have evolved as organic expressions of the community's cultural values, growing and developing within the social fabric as manifestations of collective identity and shared experience. From a sociological perspective, the community dynamics of Kedang Ipil Village align with Emile Durkheim's conceptualization of society as an objective reality that exists independently of its members, yet simultaneously shapes and is shaped by collective action and shared consciousness. The transmission of these musical traditions follows patterns of intergenerational knowledge transfer that are characteristic of indigenous communities worldwide. Each instrument in the *Kelentangan* ensemble carries specific cultural significance, with the instruments themselves being inherited from ancestral predecessors as tangible links to the community's historical and spiritual foundations. According to the belief system of Kedang Ipil Village residents, the *Kelentangan* instrument holds particular sacred importance, as it must be present in every traditional ceremony, including the Belian Namang ritual within the Tepung Tawar ceremony. This sacred status reflects the instrument's role not merely as a musical tool but as a spiritual intermediary that facilitates communication between the material and supernatural realms.

The functional significance of the *Kelentangan* musical ensemble extends beyond its role as ceremonial accompaniment to encompass multiple layers of meaning and purpose within the ritual context. The ensemble's performance provides essential support for the successful execution of the Belian Namang ritual, creating the appropriate sonic environment for spiritual transformation and community participation. The music serves as both a structural framework for ritual activity and a catalyst for the altered states of consciousness necessary for effective spiritual communication. This multifaceted functionality positions the *Kelentangan* tradition as a central element in the community's religious and social life, making its presence indispensable for the authentic performance of the Tepung Tawar ceremony.

This research contributes to the broader field of applied ethnomusicology by examining how traditional musical practices can be understood not merely as objects of academic study, but as living systems of cultural knowledge that continue to serve vital functions within contemporary indigenous communities.

The theoretical framework for this investigation draws upon established ethnomusicological methodologies while incorporating insights from applied anthropology and community-based research approaches. The analysis of musical function employs Alan P. Merriam's «The Anthropology of Music». Specifically, this study focuses on four key functions identified by Merriam: communication, symbolic representation, validation of social institutions, and cultural continuity.

The musical analysis component of this research utilizes the analytical framework developed by William P. Malm in "Music Cultures of the Pacific, The Near East and Asia", which offers a systematic approach to describing melodic characteristics in non-Western musical traditions. This study employs six key analytical categories from Malm's framework: scale structure, tonal center, pitch range, frequency of specific pitches, intervallic relationships, and melodic formulas. This dual theoretical approach allows for a comprehensive examination that encompasses both the cultural functions of the musical tradition and the specific structural characteristics of its melodic content. The research objectives for this investigation are twofold: first, to describe and analyze the functions of *Kelentangan* music within the Belian Namang ritual of the Tepung Tawar ceremony; and second, to examine the melodic elements present in the Gendang Bujur song, which serves as a central musical component of this ritual activity.

## 2. Literature Review

The field of applied ethnomusicology has evolved significantly since its emergence in the late 20th century, establishing itself as a discipline that bridges academic scholarship with community-based cultural practice. Svanibor Pettan and Jeff Todd Titon define applied ethnomusicology as "the

approach to the study of music that prioritizes making a difference in the world", emphasizing the field's commitment to research that serves communities and contributes to cultural preservation efforts (Pettan & Titon, 2015, p. 4). This definition aligns with Harrison's conceptualization of applied ethnomusicology as a practice that "engages with communities as partners rather than subjects", highlighting the collaborative nature that distinguishes applied work from traditional ethnomusicological research (Bennett et al., 2014, p. 12).

The theoretical foundations of applied ethnomusicology draw heavily from the seminal work of Alan P. Merriam, whose "The Anthropology of Music" (1964) established a comprehensive framework for understanding music's multifaceted roles within cultural contexts. Merriam's tripartite model, which examines music through the lenses of concept, behavior, and sound, provides a holistic approach that has been particularly influential in applied research contexts. His identification of ten universal functions of music—including communication, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, symbolic representation, physical response, enforcement of conformity to social norms, validation of social institutions, contribution to continuity and stability of culture, contribution to integration of society, and emotional expression—continues to serve as a foundational analytical framework for contemporary ethnomusicological research (Merriam, 1964, pp. 219–227).

Building upon Merriam's work, Timothy Rice emphasizes the importance of understanding music as a "lived experience" that encompasses not only the acoustic properties of musical sounds but also the social, cultural, and spiritual contexts in which these sounds are produced and consumed (Rice, 2014). This perspective has been particularly influential in the development of applied ethnomusicological methodologies that prioritize community voices and indigenous knowledge systems in the research process.

The concept of musical formula, as developed by Lord's work on oral tradition and subsequently adapted for ethnomusicological analysis by Nettl, provides a useful framework for understanding how repetitive melodic structures function within ritual contexts (Lord, 1960; Nettl, 1974). This approach recognizes that repetition serves multiple functions within traditional musical practices, including facilitating memorization, creating meditative states, and providing frameworks for improvisation.

### 3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method based on applied ethnomusicology. It focuses on working with the community, being respectful of their culture, and building mutual relationships. The approach combines traditional ways of studying music with modern research methods. This helps both create new knowledge and preserve the community's culture. Following Titon's idea that applied ethnomusicology should "make a difference in the world" (Pettan & Titon, 2015), the study

works closely with the Kedang Ipil community as equal partners in the research, not just as people being studied. The descriptive qualitative method, as explained by Sugiono, is a way to look at data by describing it as it is, without trying to make broad conclusions (Sugiono, 2016).

This aligns with how ethnomusicology usually works, focusing on detailed descriptions and cultural meaning. It also makes sure the results are useful and easy to understand for the people in the community. This method lets researchers thoroughly record musical practices in their cultural. Additionally, this study incorporates elements of the participatory action research model as adapted for ethnomusicological contexts by Bartleet and Ellis. This framework positions community members as co-researchers rather than simply as sources of information, recognizing the expertise that community practitioners bring to understanding their cultural traditions (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). This approach has proven particularly valuable in studies of indigenous musical traditions, where community ownership of cultural knowledge is a central concern and where external research must be conducted with careful attention to issues of cultural sovereignty and intellectual property rights (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009).

The research was conducted in *Kedang Ipil* Village, selected as the primary field site due to its active maintenance of the *Belian Namang* ritual tradition within the *Tepung Tawar* ceremony and the community's willingness to participate in collaborative research. The village represents an ideal case study for applied ethnomusicological investigation, as it maintains vibrant traditional practices while simultaneously engaging with processes of cultural documentation and preservation. The community's commitment to cultural continuity, combined with their openness to academic collaboration, creates an optimal environment for research that can serve both scholarly and community objectives.

The selection of *Kedang Ipil* Village as the research location was informed by preliminary community consultation and the establishment of appropriate research permissions through traditional leadership structures. This process ensured that the research was conducted with full community consent and by local protocols for cultural documentation. The geographic and cultural specificity of the research site enables in-depth analysis of particular musical and ritual traditions, while contributing to broader understandings of Indonesian indigenous cultural practices.

#### **4. Results:**

The *Kelentangan* music ensemble plays a crucial role as accompaniment for the *Belian Namang* ritual within the *Tepung Tawar* tradition, serving multiple essential functions that support the successful execution of this ceremonial practice. Based on ethnographic analysis, four primary functions emerge: communication, symbolic representation, validation of social institutions, and cultural continuity.

#### 4.1 Communication Function

According to Alan P. Merriam's, music within specific cultural contexts contains particular signals and meanings comprehensible only to members of that cultural community. The *Belian Namang* ritual incorporates sacred mantras (memang) known exclusively to ritual specialists (pembelian) who conduct the ceremony. These mantras contain symbolic elements transmitted from the pembelian to ancestral spirits, with *Kelentangan* music serving as the accompanying medium during mantra recitation.

Community members maintain a profound belief that *Kelentangan* musical accompaniment functions as a communication tool between the living community and ancestral spirits. Ethnographic interviews revealed significant insights:

*"Only we know the rules and patterns of playing this music, and there are specific signals - when it's played this way, the dance follows accordingly"* (Abud, traditional musician)

*"We must use Kelentangan so we can communicate with the spirits above to convey our intentions; only those who know the musical requirements can play it"* (Sartin, ritual specialist)

These testimonies demonstrate that *Kelentangan* instruments maintain a direct connection to ritual proceedings, serving as sacred communication media between pembelian and ancestral spirits. Field observations confirm that each musical pattern within the *Kelentangan* ensemble remains known exclusively to musicians and *Belian Namang* dancers, forming an essential component of this ritual's sacred communication system.

#### 4.2 Symbolic Representation Function

Merriam's analytical framework (1964) suggests that musical elements such as tempo carry symbolic meaning - slower tempos typically represent melancholy or contemplation. The *Kelentangan* ensemble accompaniment for *Belian Namang* incorporates two distinct tempos: moderate tempo (Andante: 102 BPM) and fast tempo (Allegretto: 127 BPM), each carrying specific symbolic significance.

Ethnographic interviews provided crucial understanding of these temporal symbols:

*"When the music is slow, the dancers also move slowly - this usually means they're still on their journey, not yet reached the place of the deities. When it's fast, they're about to arrive"* (Abud, traditional musician)

*"Fast music has its meaning - when dancers move quickly, musicians also play rapidly. When slow, musicians follow slowly. There's meaning in this: fast means they're about to arrive, slow means they're still*



Figure 1. Bememang Procession of  
*Belian Namang* in *Tepung Tawar*  
Ritual (Source: Ditha's  
Documentation, 2023)



*traveling"* (Murad, community elder)

These testimonies reveal that moderate tempo symbolically represents the *Belian Namang* dancers' lengthy journey toward ancestral spirit realms, while accelerated tempo signifies the dancers' approaching arrival at their spiritual destination.

#### 4.3 Social Institution Validation Function

Merriam's framework emphasizes music's vital role in ceremonial contexts (1964). *Kelentangan* music holds indispensable importance within *Belian Namang* ritual ceremonies, as the ensemble must be present to legitimize the ritual proceedings. Community members consider this musical accompaniment among the essential requirements for valid ritual execution. Interview data support this institutional function:

*"Kelentangan music is important and can be considered sacred because this Belian ritual must have music. Without music, this ritual is not valid"* (Sartin, ritual specialist)

*"This music is essential - without it, this ritual cannot proceed, because this music is sacred for this ritual, so it must be present"* (Murad, community elder)

These statements confirm that *Kelentangan* ensemble presence represents a fundamental requirement for *Belian Namang* ritual validity. Without musical accompaniment, the ceremony cannot proceed and lacks legitimacy. *Kelentangan* music thus functions as institutional validation, establishing sacred authenticity for the *Kedang Ipil* community's ritual practice.



**Figure 2. *Kelentangan* Music Ensemble as Accompaniment for *Belian Namang* in *Tepung Tawar* Ritual (Source: Ditha's Documentation, 2023)**



#### 4.4 Cultural Continuity Function

Merriam defines cultural continuity function as containing teachings that perpetuate cultural systems across generations (1964). The *Belian Namang* ritual typically involves experienced practitioners who master the ceremonial procedures. Musical patterns within the *Kelentangan* ensemble can be transmitted to subsequent generations, though some younger community members find these patterns challenging to master.

Research interviews revealed intergenerational transmission dynamics:

*"We're willing to teach, but they say it's difficult - the patterns are hard to play, so only we know how to play them"* (Abud, traditional musician)

*"Yes, young people participate - the ritual leader's grandson is being taught to join so this ritual continues in the future"*(Community member)

Field observations documented young practitioners participating in current rituals, including Indra, grandson of a prominent *pembelian*, actively engaged in ceremonial practice. This demonstrates successful cultural continuity function implementation within the community's traditional knowledge transmission system.

**Figure 3. *Pembelian* (Ritual Specialists) of *Belian Namang* in *Tepung Tawar* Ritual, Indra in the 4th row from the right (Source: Ditha's Documentation, 2023)**



#### 5. Discussions

Kedang Ipil Village represents one of the significant cultural repositories within Kota Bangun District, Kutai Kartanegara Regency, maintaining ancestral traditions through various artistic expressions including Nutuk Beham, traditional wedding ceremonies, Behempas, and *Belian Namang* within *Tepung Tawar* rituals. The ethnomusicological analysis reveals that

*Kelentangan* music ensemble functions as more than mere accompaniment within Belian Namang rituals. The four identified functions - communication, symbolic representation, social institution validation, and cultural continuity - demonstrate the sophisticated integration of musical practice with spiritual, social, and cultural systems. This finding aligns with broader ethnomusicological understanding of music's multifaceted role within indigenous communities, extending beyond entertainment to encompass sacred, social, and educational dimensions.

The communication function reveals particularly significant insights into indigenous epistemology and spiritual practice. The exclusive knowledge system governing musical patterns and their corresponding ritual meanings reflects sophisticated cultural encoding mechanisms that preserve sacred knowledge while maintaining community cohesion. This sacred communication system demonstrates how musical practice serves as both medium and message within ritual contexts, facilitating transcendent communication while reinforcing community identity and spiritual continuity.

The correlation between musical tempo and spiritual journey phases reveals indigenous understanding of music as a symbolic language capable of representing complex spiritual concepts. The requirement for *Kelentangan* accompaniment to validate ritual proceedings demonstrates music's function as a cultural authentication mechanism. This finding has implications for understanding how communities maintain traditional legitimacy while navigating contemporary pressures, suggesting that musical practice serves as both a conservative and adaptive cultural strategy.

The cultural continuity function, while showing evidence of successful intergenerational transmission, also reveals challenges facing traditional knowledge systems. The difficulty younger community members experience in mastering complex musical patterns reflects broader tensions between traditional and contemporary educational systems.

The musical analysis of the *Gendang Bujur* composition reveals a sophisticated indigenous musical system employing a pentatonic framework with specific tonal relationships and structural organization. This finding challenges assumptions regarding the complexity of indigenous musical systems and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of tonal relationships and melodic development within traditional contexts.

Beyond its obvious role in ritual timing and coordination, repetitive structure facilitates trance induction, memorization for oral transmission, and creation of sacred temporal space distinct from ordinary time. From an applied ethnomusicological perspective, this research demonstrates practical implications for cultural preservation efforts. The documentation and analysis methodology employed here provides replicable frameworks for similar studies within other indigenous communities facing cultural preservation challenges. The integration of traditional ethnographic methods with contemporary analytical tools offers balanced approaches respecting indigenous knowledge systems while providing accessible

documentation for preservation and transmission purposes. The study also reveals complex negotiations between tradition and modernity within contemporary indigenous communities. Furthermore, this research contributes to broader discussions regarding the role of applied ethnomusicology in community development and cultural sustainability. By documenting and analyzing traditional musical practices, researchers can provide communities with tools for cultural preservation while contributing to academic understanding of music's multifaceted social functions. This reciprocal relationship between academic research and community needs exemplifies applied ethnomusicology's potential for meaningful cultural contribution.

The findings also have implications for understanding indigenous knowledge systems more broadly. Finally, this research raises important questions regarding the sustainability of traditional cultural practices within contemporary contexts. While documenting successful cultural transmission, the study also reveals vulnerabilities within traditional knowledge systems. The challenge of teaching complex musical patterns to younger generations reflects broader issues regarding the relationship between formal and informal education, the role of traditional authorities in contemporary contexts, and the adaptation of traditional knowledge transmission methods to contemporary social conditions. These findings suggest that effective cultural preservation requires more than documentation and analysis.

### 6. Conclusions

This applied ethnomusicological study of *Kelentangan* music within the *Belian Namang* ritual of Kedang Ipil's Tepung Tawar tradition reveals the profound integration of musical practice with spiritual, social, and cultural systems in indigenous communities. The research demonstrates that traditional music functions far beyond mere accompaniment, serving as a vital mechanism for cultural preservation, community cohesion, and spiritual continuity.

The investigation identified four primary functions of *Kelentangan* music: communication, symbolic representation, validation of social institutions, and cultural continuity. The communication function establishes *Kelentangan* as a sacred medium facilitating dialogue between the material and spiritual worlds, with exclusive knowledge systems governing musical patterns and their ritual meanings. The symbolic representation function, manifested through tempo variations, demonstrates a sophisticated indigenous understanding of music as a symbolic language capable of representing complex spiritual concepts, particularly the correlation between musical tempo and spiritual journey phases.

From an applied ethnomusicological perspective, this research provides significant contributions to both academic understanding and practical cultural preservation efforts. The methodology employed offers replicable frameworks for similar studies within other indigenous communities, while

the integration of traditional ethnographic methods with contemporary analytical tools provides balanced approaches that respect indigenous knowledge systems while creating accessible documentation for preservation and transmission purposes.

The study reveals that successful cultural preservation requires adaptive strategies that maintain essential cultural elements while accommodating contemporary contexts. Key implications of this study include the recognition that effective cultural preservation extends beyond documentation and analysis to require comprehensive approaches integrating academic research, community development, and educational innovation. The findings suggest that sustainable cultural continuity depends on creating conditions that support traditional knowledge transmission while addressing contemporary educational, economic, and social challenges.

This research demonstrates the vital role of applied ethnomusicology in facilitating meaningful dialogue between academic scholarship and community needs. By providing communities with tools for cultural preservation while contributing to academic understanding of music's multifaceted social functions, applied ethnomusicological research exemplifies the potential for reciprocal relationships between researchers and indigenous communities. The study ultimately confirms that traditional musical practices like *Kelentangan* serve as repositories of cultural knowledge, vehicles for spiritual experience, and mechanisms for social cohesion.

## 7. References

- Bartleet, B.-L., & Ellis, C. (2009). *Making Autoethnography Sing/Making Music Personal*. Australian Academic Press Bowen Hills, QLD.
- Bennett, T., Dibley, B., & Harrison, R. (2014). Introduction: Anthropology, collecting and colonial governmentalities. *History and Anthropology*, 25(2), 137–149.
- Lord, A. B. (1960). *The Singer of Tales* Harvard University Press. Ceambridge (Mass).
- Malm, W. P. (1967). *Music Cultures of the Pacific, the Near East, and Asia*. (No Title).
- Malm, W. P. (1993). *Kebudayaan Musik Pasifik, Timur Tengah dan Asia*. Terj. Muhammad Takari. Amerika Serikat: Prentice Hall.
- Merriam, A. P. (1964). *The Anthropology of Music*. Northwestern University Press.
- Nettl, B. (1974). Thoughts on improvisation: A comparative approach. *The Musical Quarterly*, 60(1), 1–19.
- Pettan, S., & Titon, J. T. (2015). *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*. Oxford University Press.
- Rice, T. (2014). Ethnomusicology in times of trouble. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 46, 191–209.
- Sugiono, S. (2016). Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R & D. Bandung: Alfabeta, 288.