

JANGIN IN GAYO ORAL LITERATURE: A BLEND OF ENTERTAINMENT, TRADITION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL WISDOM

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ABSTRACT

Jangin is an important form of oral literature in the Gayo community in Aceh, Indonesia. As a traditional oral poetry performed in the Gayo language with a distinctive rhythm, *jangin* contains expressions of feelings, guidance, satire, and social and spiritual observations. This paper attempts to analyze the form, function, and cultural value of *jangin* as an intangible cultural heritage. This study uses a qualitative approach with an ecological theory analysis tool to understand the meaning of *jangin texts*. The results show that *jangin* consists of poetic verses, sung in the Gayo language with a distinctive rhythm, and has themes of religiosity, romanticism, social criticism, and ecological awareness. Functionally, *jangin* is not only used for entertainment but also as a medium for moral education, social communication, and preservation of environmental wisdom. The cultural values embedded in *jangin practices* reflect the Gayo community's strong ties to nature, spirituality, and collective identity. This study highlights the importance of preserving *jangin* as an intangible cultural heritage in relation to global cultural and environmental issues. This study implies that the preservation of *jangin* is crucial not only for maintaining Gayo linguistic and cultural identity, but also for passing on valuable ecological wisdom and moral guidance to the younger generation. In the face of globalization and environmental challenges, *jangin* can serve as a powerful medium for cultural resilience and sustainable living. Therefore, systematic documentation, digital archiving, and integration into educational and cultural programs are highly recommended to ensure its continued vitality.

Keywords: *Jangin*; oral literature; Gayo, tradition

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INTRODUCTION

Oral literature functions as a vital expression of culture that is transmitted across generations through oral tradition. As more than just a form of entertainment, oral literature embodies traditional values, worldviews, and local wisdom embedded in daily life of the society (Finnegan, 2012; Sibarani, 2012). In many public customs, oral traditions play a central role in preserving collective identity as well as moral, social, and ecological values to young generations (Darman, 2014; Verlinda, 2020). However, in the era of globalization and modernization, many oral literary forms face the threat declining vitality or even extinction. This situation creates the need of systematic documentation, archiving, and critical studies to safeguard this irreplaceable cultural heritage from being lost to time.

Among rich oral literary tradition in Indonesia, Gayo people hold a remarkably diverse treasury of oral works, including *didong*, *saman*, *bines*, and *jangin*. Among the forms, *jangin* stand out as a typical oral poetry tradition in Gayo language which is distinguished by its intonation, rhythm, and tone (Hanafiah et al., 1985). As a literary works, *jangin* contains combination between entertainment, noble traditions, and profound ecological consciousness aspects. This oral poetry not only express personal emotions, moral guidance, and satire, but also becoming social and spiritual landscape of Gayo society (Ay, 2020). It is performed in various aspects of life, start from lullabies, healing rituals, agriculture activities like planting and harvesting rice within larger performing arts ensembles such as *didong* and *bines*.

The main uniqueness of *jangin* lies in the use of nature metaphor such as mountains, trees, rivers, shades, and seasonal changes for the close relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator (Berkes, 2017). The themes harmoniously weave together the religiosity, romance, social critique, and ecological awareness. This characteristic show that *jangin* is not merely an artistic entertaining expression, but rather a dynamic medium for cultural transmission, ethical guidance, and wisdom delivery to support local environment sustainability (Masruchin, 2017). Through the verses of his poetry, *jangin* contain calls, prohibitions, and warnings customs that regulate how human should interact in a harmonious way with the surroundings.

Previous research about Gayo oral literature has given valuable insights for the academic world. Some previously work tends to focus on *didong* as an educational medium character and social criticism (Maulidha, 2024), and explore general moral values in Gayo folklore and its relevance to formal education (Fadilah, 2023). Although the study succeeded highlight the role of pedagogical and formation identity of oral Gayo tradition, specific research studying *jangin* is still very limited. Most of the existing literatures about *jangin* generally descriptive, focusing on textual surface meaning or social function in a macro scope (Safrijal, 2018). There is no adequate attention studying *jangin* in a comprehensive way as a unity form of entertainment, traditions, and environmental wisdom through integrated approach. In particular, the ecology dimensions embedded in natural metaphor of *jangin* has not yet explored in a comprehensive way by using ecological or ecocriticism theory.

The gap in this research is important to fill quickly, especially amid modern challenges like global environmental degradation and shifts in cultural values due to modernization. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the structural forms, functions, and cultural values of *jangin* as an intangible cultural heritage of the Gayo community. Through

a qualitative approach with the lens of ecological theory, this research seeks to uncover the deeper meanings contained in the *jangin* texts. Specifically, this study is aimed at answering three main questions:

1. What is the structural form of the stanzas in the poems and the dominant themes (religiosity, romanticism, social critique, and ecological awareness) that make up the *jangin* texts?
2. What are the multidimensional functions of *jangin* in Gayo society, whether as a medium of entertainment, moral guidance, social communication, or the preservation of environmental wisdom?
3. How do the cultural and ecological values embedded in the practice of *jangin* reflect the Gayo community's connection to nature, spirituality, and their collective identity?

Through this ecological analysis, it is hoped that the research will not only contribute to the theoretical treasury of oral literature, but also highlight the practical urgency of preserving *jangin* to maintain cultural resilience, nurture linguistic identity, and pass on sustainable living wisdom to future generations.

METHOD

This study used qualitative with descriptive - analytical design. It aimed to give detailed description and deep understanding about *jangin* as oral literary tradition in Gayo society. According to Moleong (2014), a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for describing phenomena in the form of written or spoken words, as well as observed behaviors, within their natural settings. In this study, a qualitative approach was employed to analyze the text, functions, and values embedded in *jangin* as an integrated cultural expression that combines entertainment, noble traditions, and environmental wisdom.

This study was implemented in Gayo Lues Regency, Aceh, Indonesia, specifically in the villages where the *jangin* tradition continues to be actively practiced and preserved by the local communities. The research site was selected by using purposive sampling because its highland, mountainous, and agrarian landscapes reflect the ecological and cultural characteristics that underpin the Gayo community's way of life.

The data sources in this study were divided into two categories namely: primary data and secondary data. The primary data consisted of *jangin* texts or poetic verses obtained directly from oral performances, as well as interview that are collected from the informants. A total of eight key informants participated in this study, including members of the Gayo Customary Council (Majelis Adat Gayo), community leaders, local artists, and *jangin* practitioners. The informants were selected using the snowball sampling technique to ensure the depth and credibility of the information obtained. The secondary data consisted of written documents, manuscripts, previous audio-visual recordings, and relevant literature that supported the study.

The data were collected through a number of techniques as following:

1. Participants and non-participants observation: it was conducted with observing direct show *jangin* in various context such as social, entertainment, and traditional rituals (agriculture, lullaby, art groups, and traditional rituals activity).
2. In-depth Interview: In-depth interviews were conducted with customary elders and local artists to explore the transitional functions, moral values, and symbolic meanings associated with the performance of *jangin*.

3. Audio-Visual Recording: Audio-visual recordings were employed to document the oral and auditory characteristics of *jangin* performance, including their distinctive rhythm, intonation, tone, and expressive delivery. The recorded data were subsequently transcribed into written text to facilitate qualitative analysis.
4. Documentat analysis: Written text, manuscripts, and relevant secondary materials were analyzed to verify and validate the structure of *jangin* poetic verses investigated in this study.

Furthermore, the analytical tools and theories of *jangin* text analysis in this study were examined through the integration of three main approaches, namely (1) Ecological Theory / Ecocriticism (Young, 1989): It is used as the primary analytical tool to examine the symbiotic relationship between humans, culture, and the physical environment of the highlands as reflected in the natural metaphors of the *jangin* text. This theory helped to reveal how *jangin* functions as a medium for conveying environmental wisdom. (2) The Hermeneutic Approach (Rafiek, 2022): It is used to interpret the implicit meanings, spiritual messages, moral guidance, and satire contained within the verses of *jangin* poetry based on their cultural and historical context. (3) Content Analysis (Ratna, 2022): It is used to systematically identify, classify, and analyze the structure of words, phrases, and sentences in *Jangin* poetry verses.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1992), which was adapted into four operational stages;

1. Data Collection: Data were collected through observations, transcriptions of *jangin* recordings, interviews with informants, and documentation of the ecological context in which *jangin* was performed, such as during planting, rice harvesting, and traditional healing practices.
2. Data Reduction: Selecting, emphasizing, and simplifying the data. This phase is carried out based on the formulation of the problem, that were grouping it into specific themes: religiosity, romanticism, social criticism, and ecological awareness.
3. Data Display: The reduced data were organized and presented in a structured narrative format. The data were systematically described to illustrate the structure of the *jangin* poetic verses, their multidimensional functions (e.g., entertainment, moral guidance, and communication), and the ecological values embedded within them.
4. Conclusion drawing and verification: Conclusions were drawn by contextualizing the field findings using ecological and hermeneutic perspectives. At this stage, the findings were verified to confirm the position of *jangin* as an intangible culture heritage that promotes cultural resilience and sustainable living.

Through this integrated methodological approach, the study provides a holistic understanding of *jangin* not only as a form of entertainment but also as a living tradition that reflects the Gayo community's commitment to environmental sustainability and collective identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study are presented and discussed based on three primary research questions, focusing on the structural form of *jangin* poetic verses, their multidimensional social functions, and the ecological and cultural values embedded in the *jangin* texts of the Gayo Lues community. Through the integration of orality, hermeneutic,

and ecocritical perspectives, *jangin* is examined not merely as a linguistic artifact of the past but as a dynamic cultural medium that integrates aesthetic entertainment, the preservation of tradition, and the expression of environmental wisdom (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996; Raden, 2021).

1. Structure form and dominant Themes in *Jangin* Text

Jangin is a rich and dynamic form of oral literary heritage of the Gayo community that serves as a linguistic repository of collective memory and a record of the ecological knowledge of the Aceh highlands (Hanafiah et al., 1985; Melalatoa, 2019). Based on data collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis in Gayo Lues, *jangin* is expressed in two principal structural forms: folk prose and folk poetry. This dual structure is consistent with the classification of oral folklore proposed by Danandjaja (2007) and further emphasized by Endraswara (2016), who argue that narrative elements are integrated with rhythmic components to strengthen cultural transmission while reinforcing the role of oral literature in preserving the ecological values and customary traditions of the community.

The folk prose form of *jangin* encompasses myths, legends, and local folktales that are performed through rhythmic oral recitation. For example, *jangin* is based on traditional myths that performed during agricultural activities, such as harvesting crops, collecting wild honey, and tapping palm sap. Through these narrative performances, moral and ethical values are transmitted to younger generations. One example advises children to wash their feet before going to bed to protect them from harmful spirits. A protective chant reads “*Kesek-kesek kui bar-bar, udukku muleloyang, kemiringku jebang-jebang, iponku bek galang.*” Another example is found in the communal legend “*Batu Belah*”, which contains the following poetic-narrative lines: “*Atu belah, atu bertangkup, itangkupenko peh terok dedeku,*” Traditionally, these verses are chanted in a mournful tone when a mother approaches the sacred stone (Safrijal, 2018). The prose-based chants rely heavily on repetitive phonological patterns, particularly alliteration, to reinforce moral discipline, obedience, and environmental awareness among younger generations (Sibarani, 2012; Teeuw, 2015).

In contrast, the poetic form of *jangin*, which consists of structured and rhythmic verses, is more dominant and is commonly performed in traditional Gayo performing arts, such as *saman*, *bines*, and *didong*, as well as in ritual chants (*kemali*) recited during healing ceremonies and agricultural activities (Yoga, 2020). *Jangin* is performed in the Gayo language using distinctive intonation, tonal modulation, and rhythmic patterns, making it a highly valued form of aesthetic expression and entertainment. Its themes encompass religiosity, romantic relationships, social criticism, longing for one's homeland, and a profound sense of ecological awareness (Ay, 2020). These themes are conveyed through rich natural metaphors involving mountains, trees, rivers, lakes, and seasonal changes, illustrating how the physical landscape of the Gayo Highlands is transformed into a literary space for expressing cultural values and environmental consciousness (Berkes, 2017; Buell, 2005).

2. Function of the *jangin* in Gayo Community

Jangin performs multidimensional social functions within the Gayo community that extend far beyond its role as a form of conventional entertainment. This oral literary tradition serves as an important medium for moral education, the transmission of customary values, social communication, and spiritual guidance (Darman, 2014; Finnegan, 2012). From early childhood, *jangin* is introduced through lullabies (*denang*), which function to instill linguistic identity and emotional attachment at the subconscious level (Verlinda, 2020). When children become ill, *jangin*-based healing chants are recited by customary elders as a form of psychological and spiritual healing (Hanafiah et al., 1985). Throughout adulthood, *jangin* remains closely integrated into agrarian rituals, from rice planting (*nenggala*) to the harvest season, making it an inseparable part of the Gayo community's cultural life cycle (Masruchin, 2017; Sukmawan, 2016).

One of crucial example from socio-cultural function and to improve traditional bounding, *jangin* can examined in excerpt text following:

"Ulakmi ko ulak ari ranto jarak / Le ku tanoh Gayo / Kampung itaringen / Enge putetangak / Ulakmi dagang ranto."

This text clearly expresses a profound longing for one's homeland while calling upon Gayo migrants to return to their ancestral land. A hermeneutic analysis (Rafiek, 2022) reveals that the explicit expression *ulakmi* (return) represents a deep sense of homesickness at the textual level. At a deeper semantic level, however, it reflects an implicit cultural ideology that emphasizes the collective responsibility to preserve communal solidarity (*sara kerefeten*) and to safeguard the ancestral homeland inherited from previous generations (Melalatoa, 2019; Safrijal, 2018).

This critical interpretation follows Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework (1981, 1984), which progresses from pre-understanding, through structural explanation, to the appropriation of meaning. Within this philosophical framework, the *jangin* text constructs a "world of the text" in which the Gayo homeland is envisioned not merely as a geographical place but as a cultural and ecological space. This textual world evokes not only an emotional attachment to the homeland but also a moral and ecological responsibility on the part of the Gayo diaspora (Palmer, 2018; Rafiek, 2022). Furthermore, the recurring natural imagery in the corpus – such as *rempelam* (mango tree), *ulung si layu* (withered leaves), and *hejeb dih kemaro* (the hardship of the dry season) demonstrates that the Gayo homeland is represented not simply as a geopolitical territory but as a fragile ecosystem whose sustainability depends on the collective responsibility of its community (Garrard, 2012; Zapf, 2016).

3. Embedded Cultural and Ecological Values in *Jangin*

Jangin inherently embodies the integration of cultural values and environmental ethics, functioning as an indigenous framework for environmental conservation in the Gayo Highlands. From an ecocritical perspective, natural elements such as mountains, endemic trees, and seasonal cycles are not merely passive geographical settings but central symbols that convey profound philosophical and cultural meanings (Adugna, 2014; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996).

In *jangin* texts with romantic themes, such as: *"O mayang si tetayang bade / Keta besilo*

se aku pececengang / Kayu sara batang / Ulunge murensee ..." natural metaphors, including *kayu sara batang* (a solitary tree) and *ulunge murensee* (fallen leaves), are employed to represent the fragility of love, loyalty, and human commitment. These metaphors reinforce the Gayo worldview, in which the dynamics of nature symbolically mirror human emotions and the stability of social relationships (*kasihen enti lale, sayang enti lalang*) (Hanafiah et al., 1985; Rueckert, 1996).

Similarly, *jangin* texts that express grief and loss, such as: "*Nge taring dapur reduk / Remuk rasani ate / Kunehku gere gabuk ...*" employ bleak ecological imagery, including expressions such as *enge osop tempat teduh* (the loss of shelter) and *suluh empot i dene* (the extinguished torch along the path), to symbolize the collapse of security, the loss of leadership, and social disintegration. The use of these natural symbols is consistent with the fundamental principles of literary ecology, in which environmental degradation or the disappearance of natural elements is interpreted as a direct representation of the breakdown of human moral order (Berkes, 2017; Coupe, 2000). From an ecocritical perspective, this *jangin* text functions as a poetic warning that alerts the community to the systemic consequences of environmental exploitation and the destruction of ecological sanctuaries. It suggests that the degradation of the natural environment inevitably leads to the erosion of social cohesion, cultural values, and the broader socio-cultural order of the community (Adugna, 2014; Fromm, 2010).

From a functional perspective, *jangin* combines the entertaining rhythmic style of *didong* with rich didactic content, strongly reflecting Walter Ong's (1982) theory of orality. In communities that rely on oral tradition, rhythmic and formulaic expressions function as mnemonic devices that are essential for preserving communal knowledge. At the same time, they serve as effective instruments of social control, ensuring the intergenerational transmission of cultural values and traditions (Ong, 1982; Havelock, 2019). In line with the findings of Marihandono (2015) and Masruchin (2017, 2018), *jangin* incorporates customary advice (*peri mestike*), taboos (*kemali*), and customary legal warnings that guide the ethical conduct and everyday behavior of the Gayo community in their relationships with one another and with the natural environment.

Compared with other forms of Gayo oral literature, such as *didong*, which often emphasizes verbal competition and intergroup poetic duels (*didong jalu*), *jangin* is distinguished by its more intimate, personal, expressive, and lyrical character (Hanafiah et al., 1985; Safrijal, 2018). These lyrical qualities enable *jangin* to integrate aesthetic entertainment, profound cultural messages, and reflections on environmental issues into a unified artistic performance. Consequently, *jangin* serves as an effective medium for educating the community, reinforcing collective identity, and preserving local wisdom to support cultural sustainability and environmentally sustainable living (Estok, 2011; Masruchin, 2018).

Compared with similar studies on environmentally oriented oral literature in Indonesia, *jangin* demonstrates distinctive characteristics. Ahimsa-Putra's (2016) study of Javanese agrarian mantras and Endraswara's (2016) research on Dayak oral traditions indicate that many forms of environmentally related oral literature in the Indonesian archipelago operate primarily within sacred, ritualistic, and mystical contexts governed by strict customary taboos. In contrast, *jangin* exhibits remarkable functional flexibility. It

moves seamlessly between sacred and secular domains, serving both as a medium for healing chants and ritual practices and as a form of entertainment in *didong* performances and traditional lullabies (*denang*), while consistently preserving its moral authority and ecological messages. This functional adaptability enables *jangin* to remain culturally relevant across diverse social contexts without diminishing its role in transmitting environmental ethics and indigenous knowledge.

From an ecocritical perspective, *jangin* also differs significantly from other forms of environmentally oriented oral literature in Indonesia. For example, in the oral traditions of the Bajo community, nature is often perceived as a supernatural entity that must be respected and appeased through ritual practices (Agrawal, 2005). In contrast, natural metaphors in *jangin* such as *kayu sara batang* (a solitary tree) and *osop tempat teduh* (the loss of shelter) are presented in a more humanistic and emotional manner. Rather than portraying nature solely as a sacred or supernatural force, *jangin* represents it as a symbolic reflection of the psychological, moral, and social conditions of the Gayo community.

When social relationships deteriorate or members of the diaspora neglect their communal responsibilities (*ulakmi*), nature responds metaphorically through images of withered leaves, barren trees, and prolonged drought. These ecological metaphors symbolize not only environmental degradation but also the erosion of social cohesion and moral responsibility. This comparison demonstrates that *jangin* functions not merely as a passive mnemonic device but as an active ethno-ecological medium that employs lyrical aesthetics to cultivate cultural resilience, strengthen environmental ethics, and promote sustainable living in the Gayo Highlands (Adugna, 2014; Estok, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Jangin is a valuable form of oral literary heritage of the Gayo community in Gayo Lues that embodies the integration of aesthetic entertainment, cultural preservation, and environmental wisdom. Performed in the Gayo language with distinctive rhythm, intonation, and tonal modulation, *jangin* functions not only as a form of lyrical entertainment but also as a medium for moral and spiritual education and an instrument for the intergenerational transmission of cultural values. Its remarkable functional flexibility is demonstrated by its presence across various aspects of community life, ranging from domestic settings, such as lullabies, to agrarian activities, including rice planting and harvesting, healing rituals (*kemali*), and traditional performing arts such as *saman*, *bines*, and *didong*.

Textual analysis based on the integration of hermeneutic and ecocritical approaches reveals that *jangin* reflects the cultural identity of the Gayo community and its harmonious relationship with the surrounding environment. Through the use of humanistic natural metaphors such as the solitary tree (*kayu sara batang*), the loss of shelter (*osop tempat teduh*), and withered leaves, *jangin* articulates messages of communal solidarity (*sara kerefeten*), a profound longing for the homeland (*ulakmi*), and social criticism of the moral disorientation associated with contemporary society. Furthermore, the ethno-ecological messages embedded in *jangin*, including representations of the devastating consequences of prolonged drought, reinforce its role as an active medium for promoting environmental ethics. The text conceptualizes environmental degradation in the Gayo Highlands as a

direct reflection of the erosion of human morality, emphasizing the inseparable relationship between ecological sustainability and the moral integrity of the community.

Despite its profound philosophical value, knowledge of *jangin* among the younger generation is gradually declining as a consequence of globalization and modernization. Nevertheless, its remarkable adaptability including its ability to address contemporary issues such as the social impacts of excessive social media use demonstrates that *jangin* remains highly relevant as an ethical guide for modern society, promoting values of loyalty, solidarity, and environmental responsibility. The findings of this study suggest that preserving *jangin* is not merely an effort to safeguard linguistic heritage and local cultural identity, but also a global imperative for transmitting ecological wisdom that can strengthen cultural resilience and support sustainable ways of living. Therefore, strategic initiatives, including systematic documentation, digital archiving, and the integration of local wisdom into formal education curricula and cultural programs, are strongly recommended to ensure the long-term vitality and sustainability of this oral tradition.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses primarily on the textual analysis of selected *jangin* texts using hermeneutic and ecocritical frameworks. Consequently, the performative, musical, and kinetic dimensions of live *jangin* performances were not examined comprehensively. Second, the corpus analyzed in this study was largely based on a limited number of documented texts, which may not fully capture the dialectal variations and structural diversity of *jangin* across different sub-regions of the Gayo Highlands. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the geographical scope of investigation through more extensive ethnographic fieldwork and to develop a larger and more representative corpus of *jangin* texts and performances. Such an approach would provide a more holistic, comprehensive, and multidimensional understanding of this oral tradition, including its linguistic, performative, musical, ecological, and socio-cultural dimensions.

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