



Ethnography of Communication in the *Besentulak* Tradition: A SPEAKING Model Analysis of the Dynamics of Cultural Communication among the Sasak Community in Jerowaru Village

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze how the ethnography of communication operates within the *besentulak* tradition in Jerowaru Village, as one of the collective communication practices of the Sasak community that has become deeply rooted in local social and cultural life. This study not only focuses on the external form of the tradition, but also examines the communicative dimensions embedded within each stage of the ritual process, ranging from the determination of the setting, participant involvement, to the mechanism of ritual closure. Amid the currents of modernization, the communicative meanings contained in local traditions often receive limited scholarly attention. Therefore, this research seeks to uncover the structure of cultural communication operating within the tradition. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the ethnography of communication method. The *besentulak* tradition serves as the primary object for understanding the formation of communicative events, which are subsequently analyzed through Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, including setting, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre. The findings reveal that communication within the *besentulak* tradition operates in a complex manner through the simultaneous interaction of verbal, symbolic, and kinesic forms of communication. The study further demonstrates that the *besentulak* tradition functions not merely as a customary deliberative forum, but as a meaningful cultural communication system. The tradition plays a significant role in strengthening social integration, transmitting local wisdom values, and reinforcing the collective identity of the Jerowaru community. Thus, this research contributes to the development of ethnography of communication studies by positioning the Sasak local tradition as an important framework for understanding the dynamics of cultural communication in Indonesian society more comprehensively.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is essentially a contextual and dynamic cultural practice shaped through systems of values, norms, and traditions that exist within a particular community. From the perspective of the ethnography of communication developed by Dell Hymes, every communicative event cannot be separated from the cultural context.¹ Language and communication function not merely as instruments for exchanging information, but also as media for identity formation, the reinforcement of social relations, and the transmission of cultural values across generations. Therefore, communication patterns that develop within a society reflect both the social structure and worldview of the community itself.

The Sasak community on Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara, possesses various communication traditions rich in cultural values and local wisdom. One tradition that continues to be practiced today is *besentulak*, a form of collective communication deeply rooted in the social life of the people of Jerowaru Village. This tradition functions not only as a forum for deliberation, but also as a social mechanism for reproducing customary values, building communal consensus, and strengthening solidarity among community.² In practice, *besentulak* presents communication patterns involving verbal, symbolic, and social elements simultaneously, thereby forming a complex system of cultural communication.

Amid the rapid flow of modernization and social change, the sustainability of local communication traditions faces increasingly significant challenges. Changes in social structures, the penetration of global media and information, and shifts in value orientations among younger generations have the potential to influence the existence of traditional communication patterns transmitted across generations. Such conditions are also experienced by the *besentulak* tradition in Jerowaru Village. Therefore, it is important to examine how communication practices within this tradition operate, who the actors involved are, what norms regulate the interactions, and what cultural meanings are embedded within them, particularly in the context of the current social dynamics of the Jerowaru community.

As a phenomenon of cultural communication, the *besentulak* tradition represents a relevant and important object of academic inquiry. This tradition involves various interconnected communication elements, ranging from the setting and scene where interaction takes place, the identities and roles of participants, communication objectives, to the norms and rules governing the interaction process. Within the SPEAKING framework developed by Dell Hymes, each of these elements contributes significantly to shaping the meaning of a communicative event. However, *besentulak* has generally been understood

¹ Alfin Syah Putra and Teguh Ratmanto, "Media and Efforts to Maintain Traditions and Customary Values," CHANNEL Jurnal Komunikasi 7, No. 1, (April 2019): 61.

² Cindy Cintya Lauren, "Analysis of Local Community Adaptation to Social Change and Cultural Trends in Indonesia Reviewed from the Perspective of Customary Law," Wara Sains Journal of Law and Human Rights 2, No. 9, (September 2023): 877-878.

merely as a customary deliberation forum, without in-depth studies revealing its communicative dimensions comprehensively. Therefore, this research seeks to provide a more systematic analysis of the *besentulak* tradition through an ethnography of communication approach in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Sasak cultural communication.

This issue becomes increasingly important to study because local communication traditions function not only as practices of social interaction, but also as media for transmitting cultural values and reinforcing the collective identity of a community. From the perspective of local wisdom, communal traditions are regarded as social capital with a strategic role in maintaining harmony, solidarity, and social cohesion within society.³ In the context of the Sasak community in Jerowaru Village, the *besentulak* tradition represents a form of cultural communication that preserves the values of deliberation, participatory equality, and communal solidarity as the foundation of local social life. This tradition serves not only as a space for interaction among community members, but also as a social mechanism for maintaining orderly social relations and ensuring the continuity of cultural values across generations.

Within the dynamics of intercultural communication and ongoing social change, the weakening of local communication traditions may broadly influence social relations within society. The declining understanding among younger generations regarding the norms, symbols, and values embedded in the *besentulak* tradition may create intergenerational gaps in understanding the cultural communication codes of the Sasak community. Ultimately, such conditions threaten not only the continuity of local communication traditions, but also the sustainability of the social system that has long been maintained through these cultural practices.⁴ Therefore, local communication traditions should be understood as essential elements in preserving cultural continuity and the collective identity of the Jerowaru community as part of the wider Sasak society.

Studies on the ethnography of communication and local communication traditions in Indonesia have developed within the fields of communication studies and linguistic anthropology over the past several decades. Research conducted by Dell Hymes through the development of the ethnography of communication approach established the theoretical foundation that every communicative practice must be understood holistically based on its cultural context.⁵ In the Indonesian context, several previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of this approach in examining local communication traditions.

³ Nyoman Suryawan, "Local Wisdom as Social Capital in the Integration Between Balinese and Bugis Ethnic Groups in Petang Village, Badung, Bali," *Journal of Bali Studies* 7, No. 1, (May 2017)

⁴Naomi Diah Budi Setyaningrum, "Local Culture in the Global Era," *Expression of Art Journal of Science and Art Works* 20, No. 1, (July 2018): 104.

⁵ M. Rifa'i, "Ethnography of Ritual Communication of Tingkeban Neloni and Mitoni: An Ethnographic Study of Communication for the Javanese Ethnic Group in Summersuko Village, Gempol District, Pasuruan Regency," *Ettisal Journal of Communication* 2, no. 1, (June 2017): 27-40.

Research on the *tingkeban neloni* and *mitoni* rituals within Javanese communities, for example, revealed that ritual communication contains rich systems of nonverbal symbolism functioning as mechanisms of social integration within the community.⁶ Other studies concerning the application of ethnography of communication in educational settings have also shown that communication patterns within a community are strongly influenced by local social and cultural structures, indicating that communication analysis cannot be separated from its surrounding social context.

Nevertheless, studies concerning Sasak communication traditions, particularly the *besentulak* tradition in Jerowaru Village, remain relatively limited. Previous studies have generally mentioned this tradition merely as a form of customary deliberation without comprehensively examining the structure of its communicative events. In fact, according to the SPEAKING framework developed by Dell Hymes, a communicative event consists of various interrelated components, such as setting, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre. To date, only a few studies have comprehensively examined the *besentulak* tradition based on all these components. Moreover, earlier studies have tended to employ single approaches, thereby limiting their ability to integrate perspectives from group communication, linguistic anthropology, and ethnographic analysis in understanding the complexity of Sasak communication traditions as a whole.

Based on these conditions, this research is important to conduct in order to understand how the *besentulak* tradition functions as a complete cultural communicative event along with all of its constituent components. This study also aims to identify the social and cultural meanings embedded within every communicative process occurring in the tradition. In addition, this research is expected to contribute to the documentation and preservation of local communication practices as part of the cultural wisdom of the Sasak community in Jerowaru Village.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with an ethnography of communication approach to understand the *besentulak* tradition as a cultural communication practice within the community of Jerowaru Village. This approach was selected because it is capable of describing communication phenomena in depth based on actual field conditions, allowing the meanings embedded in every communicative process to be understood comprehensively and contextually.⁷ In addition to field research, this study is also supported by library research through the examination of various books, scientific journals, and previous studies related to the ethnography of communication, the SPEAKING theory developed by Dell Hymes, as well as the communication

⁶Dwi Setiawan, Lutfi Eskawati, and Diana, "Ethnography of Communication in Indonesian Language Learning at Darussalam Cimanggu Middle School," *Nusantara Community Service Journal* 4, no. 2, (June 2022): 69–75.

⁷Zainal Abidin Achmad and Rachmah Ida, "Virtual Ethnography as a Data Collection Technique and Research Method," *The Journal of Society & Media* 2, No. 2, (October 2018): 130.

culture of the Sasak community.⁸ These literature sources are used to strengthen the theoretical and analytical foundations of the research.

Data collection techniques in this study consist of observation, interviews, and documentation.⁹ Observation was conducted directly and participatively to examine the implementation of the *besentulak* tradition, including the setting of the ritual, interactions among participants, and the communication norms governing the process. In-depth interviews were conducted with customary leaders, *besentulak* ritual leaders, and community members actively involved in the tradition in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the meanings and functions of communication within *besentulak*. Meanwhile, documentation was utilized to record various research activities, including photographs, audio-visual recordings, and field notes that supported the data analysis. Through the combination of these three techniques, this study obtained more comprehensive and in-depth data regarding the dynamics of cultural communication within the *besentulak* tradition.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication approach to the *besentulak* tradition in Jerowaru Village cannot be fully understood merely through surface-level observations of communicative events. The *besentulak* tradition is not simply a customary ritual, but rather a complex and multidimensional cultural communication system. Each stage of the procession—from determining the time of implementation to the ritual closing procedures—contains interconnected communicative elements that collectively construct a unified cultural meaning. Thus, the tradition represents a form of communication that is not only verbal, but also symbolic and social within the life of the Sasak community in Jerowaru Village.

The *besentulak* tradition is carried out for three consecutive days at the end of November or the beginning of December and involves all segments of society, including customary leaders, religious figures, and children. This collective participation indicates that *besentulak* functions as both a medium of social integration and a space for transmitting local cultural values. Therefore, to comprehensively understand the communicative dimensions embedded in this tradition, the research employs participatory observation and in-depth interviews across the entire ritual process. This approach enables the researcher to identify more holistically the forms, functions, and meanings of cultural communication present in the *besentulak* tradition.

The Phenomenon of the Besentulak Tradition in Jerowaru Village

The implementation of the *besentulak* tradition in Jerowaru Village does not take place in a single fixed location but instead moves systematically according

⁸ Yunia Dwi Puspitasari and Wisda Miftakhul Ulum, "Literature Study of Hyperactive Students in Learning at School," DIDIKA Journal of Elementary Education Scientific Forum 6, no. 2, (December 2020): 309.

⁹ Marinu Waruwu, "Qualitative Research Approach: Concept, Procedure, Advantages and Role in Education," Affection Journal of Educational Research and Evaluation 5, no. 2, (April 2024): 210.

to an order established by customary elders. Based on field observations and interviews with Nurudin, a local customary leader, the first day of the ritual is conducted in the eastern part of the hamlet, the second day shifts to the western area, and the third day returns to the original location. The entire series of activities is centered in an open field located in the middle of the residential area, where community members gather collectively while bringing *dulang* (food trays) from their homes as part of the ritual. The selection of this open space carries historical and spiritual significance, as it is believed to be an appropriate place for communal prayer and collective supplication to God.

From the perspective of communicative atmosphere (scene), the *besentulak* tradition is characterized by a sacred, solemn, and highly solidaristic social environment. This atmosphere is created through the active leadership of customary figures who guide each stage of the ritual, including the burning of incense, the recitation of prayers, and the sprinkling of blessed water upon participants. In an interview, Papuk Ma'in, a customary leader in Jerowaru Village, explained that the term *besentulak* originates from the word *sentul*, meaning "to touch" or "to anoint." The tradition is believed to have originated from the story of a king who suffered from a severe illness and instructed his people to apply sacred objects to his body while praying for his recovery. This explanation demonstrates that the communicative atmosphere of *besentulak* is shaped not only by the physical setting but also by historical, symbolic, and psychological dimensions collectively shared by the community.

In Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication framework, *setting* refers to the physical and temporal context of a communicative event, while *scene* refers to the psychological and cultural atmosphere surrounding the interaction.¹⁰ Findings from this study show that these two elements are closely interconnected in the *besentulak* tradition. The open field, which appears physically simple, transforms into a culturally meaningful communicative space through the collective awareness of ancestral traditions. Thus, the meaning of communication in *besentulak* is determined not only by its physical location, but also by how the community collectively interprets the ritual as a cultural heritage passed down since the era of the Selaparang Kingdom.

Rules in the Implementation of the Besentulak Tradition in Jerowaru Village

The participants in the *besentulak* tradition in Jerowaru Village consist of various elements of society, each holding different communicative roles and functions, yet interconnected in sustaining the continuity of the customary procession. Based on field observations, those involved include the customary leader (*belian*) who serves as the ritual leader, religious figures who lead prayers and deliver the closing sermon, the village head along with local officials, and the general community across different age groups, including elders, youth, and children. These differences in position and function shape a structured pattern

¹⁰Ahmad Rifai, "A Philosophical Study of the Communicative Approach in Arabic Language Learning," *Revorma Journal of Education and Thought* 1, no. 1, (November 2021): 70.

of communication, particularly in determining who leads the ritual, who responds, and how interactions are carried out throughout the procession.

In practice, the customary leader occupies the central position in the ritual communication process. He is responsible for leading the entire sequence of activities, such as lighting incense, reciting prayers, sprinkling water that has been blessed with prayers, and placing *sembek* on participants' foreheads as a symbol of protection. Meanwhile, religious leaders take part in the final stage of the procession by delivering sermons and leading the closing prayers. On the other hand, the attending community members are not merely passive participants; they are actively involved through collective prayer, sitting in a circular formation, and participating in communal meals as a symbol of social solidarity. In an interview, Bapak Nurudin explained that the communal meal reflects the values of togetherness and kinship among the people of Jerowaru Village. This indicates that participation in the besentulak tradition occurs physically, symbolically, and communicatively in constructing collective meaning.

From the perspective of Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication, the component of *participants* plays a crucial role in determining the form, function, and meaning of a communicative event.¹¹ The findings show that the participation structure in the besentulak tradition is both dynamic and hierarchical. The customary leader, religious figures, village officials, and community members occupy different communicative positions according to their respective authority and social roles. This structure forms a distinctive interaction pattern within the besentulak tradition and illustrates how cultural communication is collectively enacted within the Sasak community of Jerowaru Village.

Meaning in the Besentulak Tradition in Jerowaru Village

Within Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model, the component "ends" refers to the goals and intended outcomes of a communicative event.¹² Based on the findings of this study, the Besentulak tradition in Jerowaru Village reflects a set of interconnected objectives that operate on spiritual, social, and cultural levels. Interview data from Papuk Salmon, a religious leader, indicate that the primary aim of Besentulak is to seek safety, protection, and deliverance from misfortune, illness, and disaster. The tradition is believed to have existed since the Selaparang Kingdom and is understood as a fusion of customary practices and religious values transmitted across generations. Within the community's belief system, Besentulak carries symbolic power to safeguard collective well-being and maintain social harmony.

¹¹ Fitria Ayuningtyas et al., "Communication Patterns of People with Special Abilities: An Ethnographic Study of Communication on Social Interactions of People with Special Abilities at the Autism Home, Depok Branch," *Expression and Perception Journal of Communication Science* 3, No. 2, (July 2020): 101.

¹² Tina Kartika et al, "Speech Community of Intercultural Students at Al Kautsar Junior High School, Bandar Lampung in an Ethnographic Communication Study," *Journal of Communication* 14, no. 1, (2021): 50.

Beyond its spiritual dimension, Besentulak also functions as a means of strengthening social relations among community members. This is clearly reflected in the practice of communal eating (*begibung*), which constitutes an essential part of the ritual. According to Bapak Samsudin, a community leader, togetherness is the core value embedded in Besentulak. Through this shared activity, residents reinforce solidarity, maintain social bonds, and strengthen a sense of kinship within Jerowaru society. Thus, the tradition serves not only as a ritual space but also as a medium of social interaction that fosters collective cohesion.

In addition, Besentulak plays a cultural role in preserving local traditions and transmitting indigenous knowledge to younger generations. Papuk Ma'in emphasizes that the tradition has been inherited from ancestors because it contains meaningful values for communal life. Therefore, its continuity is considered essential to maintaining the cultural identity of the Sasak people in Jerowaru. Overall, the "ends" of Besentulak demonstrate a multidimensional purpose: spiritual goals related to seeking divine protection, social goals related to strengthening communal solidarity, and cultural goals related to preserving identity and local heritage. This finding aligns with Dell Hymes' view that communicative events involve both outcome goals (final objectives) and process goals (goals achieved through interaction).

Procedures in the Besentulak Tradition

The sequence of communicative actions in the Besentulak tradition in Jerowaru Village is carried out in a systematic and structured manner based on inherited customary rules. Based on participant observation, the ritual on the first day begins with the preparation of *andang-andang*, traditional food such as *empok-empok* and *ketupat*, which are collectively prepared by the community. After preparation, villagers proceed to an open field while carrying food containers known as *nare*, covered with *tembolak*. Upon arrival, participants sit in a circular formation, symbolizing unity and collective readiness. The ritual leader then initiates the ceremony by burning incense and placing *saweq* (young coconut leaves decorated with flowers). This is followed by the call to prayer (*adhan*) and collective prayers led by a religious figure. Water known as *rampe*, which has been blessed through prayer, is then applied to participants' faces as a symbol of protection and safety. The ritual concludes with a communal meal, during which leftover food is not allowed to be taken home due to its symbolic significance within the tradition.

This sequence is binding and cannot be altered arbitrarily, as each stage carries distinct symbolic and communicative meanings. In an interview, Bapak Nurudin explained that the first day begins with the preparation of ritual food, including red and white porridge placed in banana-leaf containers (*rondon*), which are then brought to the ritual site for collective prayer. A similar structure is repeated on the second and third days, although the type of food varies. On the second day, participants bring red-and-white porridge, while on the third day they bring rice with various side dishes. These variations reflect symbolic meanings embedded in the communicative system of the Besentulak tradition.

From the perspective of Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication, the "act sequence" refers to the ordered series of speech acts and actions that structure a communicative event.¹³ The findings indicate that the procedural flow of Besentulak functions not merely as a customary ritual but also as a culturally regulated communication system governed by collective norms. Each stage is performed according to inherited rules passed down through generations, demonstrating a strong relationship between act sequence and norms. In this way, the continuity of procedural order in Besentulak illustrates how cultural norms sustain the stability of ritual communication patterns within Sasak society in Jerowaru Village.

Genre in the Besentulak Tradition in Jerowaru Village

Within Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model, the "key" component refers to the tone, manner, and emotional atmosphere that characterize a communicative event.¹⁴ Based on the research findings, the Besentulak tradition in Jerowaru Village is predominantly marked by a solemn, sacred, and deeply spiritual atmosphere. This atmosphere is reflected in the way the customary leader delivers prayers in a calm and authoritative tone, the orderly and respectful circular seating arrangement of participants, and the collective silence during the ritual of sprinkling rampe water upon the community. Throughout the core ritual, participants maintain disciplined behavior and controlled speech, as they collectively understand that the event constitutes a sacred communicative space connected to ancestral heritage and spiritual values. However, the communicative atmosphere shifts at certain stages of the ritual. During the communal meal session known as begibung, the atmosphere becomes warmer, more informal, and characterized by a strong sense of kinship. At this stage, participants engage in casual conversation, share food, and strengthen social bonds. In an interview, Bapak Junaidi explained that values of mutual cooperation and kinship remain strongly preserved within the Besentulak tradition. This shift in atmosphere is not considered a deviation from ritual norms, but rather an integral part of the communicative structure of Besentulak, which combines ritual sacredness with social intimacy.

From Dell Hymes' perspective, key is not only expressed through linguistic choices, but also through tone of voice, speech tempo, body language, and the emotional climate accompanying communication. The findings indicate that the shifting atmosphere in Besentulak functions as a cultural marker that highlights the integration of spiritual and social dimensions within a single communicative event. Meanwhile, the instrumentalities component in the SPEAKING framework refers to the channels and forms of communication used in a speech event.¹⁵ In the Besentulak tradition, multiple communicative instruments operate simultaneously and in a complementary manner. The primary instrument is verbal communication, delivered by the customary leader through prayers

¹³ Rifa'i, "Ethnography of Ritual Communication of Tingkeban Neloni and Mitoni," 30.

¹⁴Ri'ina et al., "Oral Events in the Sea Celebration Procession in Tanjung Luar Village, Lombok," *Asas Jurnal Sastra* 7, No. 1, (June 2020): 107.

¹⁵Ayuningtyas et al., "Communication Patterns of People with Special Abilities," 105..

recited in the Sasak language. These prayers function not only as verbal expressions but also as a spiritual medium connecting the community with God. Papuk Ma'in emphasizes that all prayers in the Besentulak tradition are directed solely to Allah SWT.

In addition to verbal communication, Besentulak also employs symbolic communication through various ritual objects. Offerings such as *empok-empok*, red-and-white porridge, and rice carry symbolic meanings that represent the values of Jerowaru society. According to Bapak Nurudin, the red-and-white porridge symbolizes balance in life, where red represents courage and vitality, while white represents sincerity and peace. Furthermore, nonverbal or kinesic communication is evident in the circular seating arrangement, the ritual movements of sprinkling water by the customary leader, and the placement of *sembek* on participants' foreheads as a symbol of protection and blessing. The diversity of these communicative instruments demonstrates that Besentulak is a highly complex cultural communication event. Verbal, symbolic, and kinesic elements operate simultaneously to construct shared meanings within the community of Jerowaru Village. Thus, the Besentulak tradition functions not only as a ritual practice but also as a cultural communication system that reflects the social values, spiritual beliefs, and local wisdom of the Sasak people.

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¹⁶ Oka Putra Pratama, "Polite Speech Acts in the Story of the Prophet Joseph," *Arabiyat: Journal of Arabic Language Education and Arabic Language* 4, no. 2, (December 2017): 231.

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CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the Besentulak tradition in Jerowaru Village functions not only as a ceremonial customary ritual, but also as a complex and meaningful cultural communication system. Based on an analysis using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model, all communicative components within the Besentulak tradition are found to be interrelated and form an integrated whole. The setting component reveals that the use of an open field that shifts systematically over three days of implementation serves as a cultural communication space imbued with historical and spiritual significance for the community. In the participants component, the involvement of customary leaders, religious figures, the village head, and the general public indicates that each individual holds distinct but complementary communicative roles in maintaining the continuity of the tradition. Meanwhile, the ends component shows that the Besentulak tradition has multidimensional objectives, namely spiritual goals through prayers for safety and protection from Allah SWT, social goals through strengthening

¹⁷ Inka Krisma Melati et al., "Islamic Characters in the Animated Film Nussa and Rara Episode of Rara's Story: A Sociolinguistic Study," CODE: Language Journal 1, no. 3, (September 2022): 90.

solidarity and communal togetherness, and cultural goals as a medium for transmitting local Sasak wisdom to future generations.

In the act sequences component, the study finds that the Besentulak ritual is carried out systematically and bound by customary rules that cannot be altered, meaning that each stage carries specific symbolic functions and communicative meanings. The key component demonstrates a combination of a sacred atmosphere during prayer rituals and a warm, familial atmosphere during the communal eating practice known as *begibung*. Furthermore, the instrumentalities component shows that the Besentulak tradition employs multiple forms of communication simultaneously, including verbal communication through prayers in the Sasak language, symbolic communication through ritual objects such as red-and-white porridge and *sembek*, and nonverbal communication through circular seating arrangements and ritual movements. In the norms component, the study identifies unwritten rules that function as a mechanism of social control in maintaining the continuity of the tradition. Meanwhile, the genre component reveals the diversity of communicative forms, ranging from ritual prayers, religious sermons, informal conversations during *begibung*, to symbolic nonverbal communication. Overall, the Besentulak tradition plays an important role as a medium of social integration, spiritual reinforcement, and cultural identity preservation among the Sasak community in Jerowaru Village. Therefore, its existence needs to be continuously preserved and transmitted amid the ongoing dynamics of modernization in society.

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