

## The Humanitarian Narrative of Pramoedya within the Local Cultural Traditions of Tenganan Pegringsingan

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### ABSTRACT

Pramoedya Ananta Toer is widely known for his humanitarian narratives that place human beings at the center of values. This idea finds its relevance in Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, Bali, which is rich in traditions and a value-based social structure. Although both reflect humanitarian values, there is still limited research linking Pramoedya's humanism with the cultural practices of indigenous communities such as those in Tenganan. The results of this study reveal three key points. First, there is a connection between Pramoedya's narrative and the social practices in Tenganan, reflecting the relationship between ideas and the implementation of values. Second, the respect given to traditional leaders is based on their social responsibility, not merely their status. Third, the traditional structure in Tenganan demonstrates collective humanitarian values through mutual cooperation (gotong royong). These findings affirm that Pramoedya's humanistic values are not only alive in literary works but also manifested within contextual local cultural practices.

### KEYWORDS

Pramoedya's Humanism, Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, Indigenous Culture, Humanitarian Values, Social Structure



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Institut Seni Indonesia  
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## Background

Pramoedya Ananta Toer is one of Indonesia's most influential literary figures, whose works have transcended both genre and time. Through the power of narrative, he presents a critical perspective on social injustice, colonialism, and political repression, while at the same time elevating the dignity of marginalized individuals. Pramoedya's humanism is not merely neutral or universal; it is deeply rooted in the complex social realities of Indonesia. In his works, such as the *Buru Quartet*, humanitarian values emerge as a form of resistance against oppressive power structures.

The humanism constructed by Pramoedya is a form of praxis, not merely a moral discourse. His perspective aligns with marginalized communities, rejects a singular historical narrative, and emphasizes the importance of historical awareness in shaping Indonesian identity [1]. These ideas have been widely analyzed in the contexts of colonialism, nationalism, and political resistance [2]. However, there remains space to

further explore how Pramoedya's humanistic principles can engage in dialogue with the living and dynamic socio-cultural realities of local communities, especially among traditional societies that continue to preserve their indigenous wisdom [3].

One of the indigenous communities that embodies unique humanitarian values is Tenganan Pegringsingan Village in Bali. As part of the Bali Aga group, the Tenganan community possesses a distinctive social structure [4], a strong customary legal system, and a worldview rooted in mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), reverence for ancestors, and communal solidarity [5]. Their traditions not only preserve material cultural expressions but also pass down ethical and humanitarian values that are embedded in daily life [6]. Placing Tenganan in dialogue with Pramoedya's concept of humanism opens possibilities for cross-disciplinary interpretations that connect literature, culture, and humanity.

Studies on Pramoedya's works have generally focused on national historical contexts, colonialism, and identity politics. Meanwhile, research on Tenganan has predominantly centered on cultural anthropology, customary systems, or tradition-based tourism. Few studies have attempted to bridge these two fields—namely, applying Pramoedya's literary humanism as an interpretative lens to explore humanitarian values within local indigenous communities. This article seeks to address that research gap, with the hope of enriching the discourse on the relevance of humanism within Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape.

This article aims to explore the humanitarian values embedded within the Tenganan Pegringsingan community by employing the humanist approach developed in the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The main focus lies in examining how Pramoedya's humanist principles can serve as a lens to interpret the social structure, worldview, and value system within indigenous communities. Through this approach, the article also seeks to emphasize that literature is not merely a representation of reality, but also a bridge for understanding the diversity of human expressions within local cultural contexts.

## Discussion and Perspectives

The results and discussion section outlines three key findings that demonstrate the alignment between Pramoedya's humanitarian narrative and its contextual application in Tenganan Pegringsingan Village. These three findings are discussed in detail as follows.

### 1. Humanitarian Narrative: The Upstream-Downstream Relationship between Pramoedya's Ideas and Tenganan's Traditional Practices

The humanitarian ideas constructed by Pramoedya Ananta Toer throughout his works emerge from his strong alignment with marginalized groups suffering from oppression and structural injustice. Through characters such as Minke in *This Earth of Mankind*

(Bumi Manusia) or Nyai Ontosoroh, Pramoedya narrates the human struggle to gain rights, dignity, and self-awareness as free individuals. His narrative is not merely a critique of oppressive systems, but also an active effort to place human beings at the center of civilization—with all their complexities and emotional depth.

Interestingly, this narrative finds strong resonance in the lived traditions of the indigenous community in Tenganan Pegringsingan. In this village, the concept of humanity is not merely a discourse but manifests in deeply rooted traditional practices [7]. The relationship between traditional leaders and community members is not built on an oppressive power hierarchy but on moral integrity, mutual trust, and collective social responsibility. Within this structure, the people of Tenganan uphold human value not solely based on status, but also on one's contribution to social and cultural harmony [8].

Furthermore, the spiritual life of the Tenganan community reflects a profound respect for human beings in relation to the universe and the Divine. The collective religious rites practiced by the community are not only religious obligations but also expressions of humanity within a spiritual dimension. It is in this space that the convergence between Pramoedya's humanitarian narrative and the traditions of Tenganan becomes evident—as an upstream-downstream relationship: with Pramoedya at the upstream as the creator of ideal narratives, and Tenganan at the downstream as the actual implementer within a living local culture.

This relationship illustrates that the humanitarian values conveyed through literature are not always confined to abstract realms. On the contrary, these values can be translated into tangible actions—even within traditional societies. The living traditions of Tenganan do not merely preserve customary forms but also serve as continuous vehicles for instilling ethical and humanitarian values. Thus, Tenganan Pegringsingan can be seen as a space for the realization of humanism—not only within literary texts but also within the social and spiritual practices of indigenous communities.

## 2. Humanizing Humanity through Tradition and Social Responsibility

One of the core principles in Pramoedya's humanism is the idea of “humanizing humanity”—that is, recognizing, treating, and valuing individuals not merely based on power or formal status, but on their existence as thinking, feeling, and responsible beings. In his works, Pramoedya repeatedly emphasizes the importance of moral awareness and social responsibility in shaping human existence. He presents characters who are not only courageous in exercising independent thought but are also willing to carry social burdens as a demonstration of their worth.

This idea finds a strong reflection within the social system of Tenganan Pegringsingan Village. In the village's customary structure, the figure of the traditional leader holds a central role—not merely as a symbol of authority but as a guardian of values, a coordinator of cultural activities, and a spiritual guide for the community. The community's trust in the traditional leader is not solely based on lineage, but rather on the significant responsibilities carried out in managing all aspects of traditional life—from planning and preparation to execution and closure of ceremonies.

Humanitarian values in this context are manifested through the community's respect for traditional leaders who perform their duties with high dedication. These leaders are not idolized as elites but are respected as bearers of collective responsibility. This form of recognition aligns with Pramoedya's humanist values: respect for individuals who actively uphold values, not merely those who inherit positions. In this way, Tenganan's customary structure successfully sustains respect for individuals based on responsibility rather than dominance.

The living traditions in Tenganan also demonstrate that social roles carried out with collective awareness create a just and dignified cultural ecosystem [9]. Traditional leaders do not act alone but work alongside the community to ensure the continuity of traditions. Community members, in turn, carry out their roles with active participation and responsibility. This relationship reflects what Pramoedya refers to as “civilized humanity,” where human value lies in integrity and contribution to maintaining a harmonious social order.

### **3. Customary Traditions and Social Structure as Pillars of Local Humanitarian Values**

In several of his works and interviews, Pramoedya Ananta Toer emphasizes how social structures and customary traditions often become contested spaces for defining humanitarian values. For Pramoedya, tradition (*adat*) can become a tool of oppression when applied rigidly and exclusively, but it can also serve as a foundation for solidarity and civility when practiced fairly and inclusively. He views social structure not merely as a hierarchical system, but as an arena where individuals determine their positions, roles, and responsibilities. Therefore, recognition of human dignity must be integrated into how communities practice their traditions and social structures.

Tenganan Pegringsingan Village provides a concrete example of customary structures that operate with a participatory approach to humanitarian values [10]. In this context, tradition and social structure are not merely preserved as ancestral heritage, but are actively implemented through clearly defined roles, collective awareness, and strong social responsibility. One of the most prominent examples is the *Mekare-kare* or *Pandan War* ceremony, which functions not only as a cultural attraction but also as a collective ritual rich in spiritual, historical, and social meaning. This tradition serves as a tribute to Dewa Indra, symbolizing courage and protection for the community.

Preparations for Mekare-kare are carried out through mutual cooperation (gotong royong) for approximately one full month, with a structured system of task distribution among community members. Traditional leaders act as coordinators, but the entire process involves participants of all ages, from youth to elders. In this regard, the social structure is not authoritarian but collaborative. The process reflects how, within the Tenganan community, every individual has a role and inherent value—a form of collective humanity that fosters equality, responsibility, and respect for participation.

This illustrates how humanistic values such as responsibility, integrity, and togetherness can organically thrive within a strong customary system. Pramoedya's vision of a just social structure that sides with marginalized people is reflected in the social practices of Tenganan. Here, tradition does not function as a tool of subjugation but as a medium for building trust, active participation, and collective awareness. Local customs and social structures thus fulfill the same purpose championed by Pramoedya through his literary narratives—placing humanity at the center of all values.

In the discussion section, it can be further explained that the humanitarian narrative embedded in the traditional practices of the Tenganan Pegringsingan community can be interpreted as a tangible reflection of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's concept of humanism. In his works, Pramoedya emphasizes the importance of respecting human dignity—not only in terms of individual rights but also within the framework of just social relations. In Tenganan, this principle does not exist merely as discourse but manifests in the community's daily life—through the relationship between traditional leaders and citizens, the performance of religious rituals, and the respect shown toward nature and fellow human beings. This demonstrates that local traditions can serve as living spaces for humanistic values, even when these values are not articulated explicitly.

While Pramoedya's characters struggle for freedom of thought and action amid colonial or authoritarian repression, the people of Tenganan express similar values through active participation in customs and traditions. The significant responsibilities borne by traditional leaders, along with the community's respect for their role, are concrete embodiments of the idea of "humanizing humanity"—that individuals are valued not merely for their positions but for their moral integrity and dedication to the community. Here, it becomes evident how responsibility, social awareness, and individual participation form essential elements of humanity, as emphasized by Pramoedya.

Furthermore, the social structure within the Tenganan community, based on participatory values and gotong royong (mutual cooperation), illustrates that tradition does not always symbolize conservatism or oppression. On the contrary, tradition can function as an instrument for building solidarity and social ethics centered on shared values. This aligns with Pramoedya's perspective, which does not reject tradition

outright but criticizes it when it becomes a tool of repression. In Tenganan, customary structures operate as mechanisms of social organization that enable the preservation of traditions and equitable, dignified human relations.

Thus, interpreting Pramoedya's humanism within the context of Tenganan Pegringsingan opens new avenues for reflecting on the application of humanitarian values within local communities. Humanism is not confined to urban or modern spaces; it can also thrive within traditional communities that uphold value systems rooted in custom and spirituality. This article demonstrates that literature and local cultural practices do not have to exist separately—both can mutually reinforce each other in voicing humanitarian values that are contextual, relevant, and alive.

## Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion presented, it can be concluded that the humanitarian narrative developed by Pramoedya Ananta Toer holds strong relevance and can be seen as a living reality within the cultural practices of the Tenganan Pegringsingan indigenous community. The humanistic values championed by Pram through his characters and stories find concrete expression in the way the people of Tenganan interpret life, social relations, and spirituality through their customs and traditions.

First, the relationship between Pram's ideas and humanitarian practices in Tenganan can be understood as a dynamic connection between upstream and downstream. Pram, as a thinker and initiator of the humanitarian narrative, represents the upstream, while the Tenganan community, as cultural practitioners, embodies the downstream, applying these values in real life. The traditions maintained in Tenganan are not merely preservations of form but are infused with humanistic meaning within social and spiritual relationships.

Second, the value of "humanizing humanity," which lies at the heart of Pram's humanism, is reflected in the social structure of Tenganan, particularly through the significant roles and responsibilities carried by the traditional leaders. The community's recognition of these leaders is not rooted in formal status alone but emerges from their moral dedication and collective responsibility in preserving values and traditions. This illustrates that in Tenganan culture, respect for individuals is based on responsibility rather than dominance.

Third, the customary and social structures in Tenganan demonstrate that tradition can serve as a foundation for a just and participatory sense of humanity. Traditions such as Mekare-kare reveal how the community works collectively with structured role divisions, carried out with full responsibility. This aligns with Pram's vision of a social



structure that does not oppress but instead creates space for participation, equality, and respect for shared values.

Thus, this article affirms that humanistic values do not only grow within literary spaces or intellectual discourse but also thrive within local cultural practices that are carried out collectively and with conscious awareness. Reading Tenganan through the lens of Pram's humanism is an effort to celebrate the diversity of Indonesia's expressions of humanity—a narrative that transcends space, history, and remains relevant to this day.

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Institut Seni Indonesia Bali for the academic support and facilities provided during the completion of this research. Deep appreciation is also extended to the Kelian Adat of Tenganan Pegringsingan Village, Mr. Putu Suarjana, for his support and permission in conducting this study. The author also conveys respect and gratitude to Mr. Putu Suardana, as a cultural practitioner and Selonding gamelan craftsman in Tenganan, for his valuable knowledge and insights. Special thanks to the academic supervisors, Prof. Dr. Wayan Swandi, Dr. Kt. Suteja, and Dr. Ketut Garwa, for their guidance, constructive input, and encouragement throughout the research process. Finally, heartfelt appreciation is given to all parties who contributed directly or indirectly to the success of this research, especially in the exploration of humanistic values within the local traditions of Tenganan Pegringsingan.

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