

***Ensera Ayor* as a Reflection of Iban Wisdom in Ethnocentrism amidst the Era of Technology**

Wan Roshazli

School Distance of Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400013>

Received: 21 March 2025; Accepted: 25 March 2025; Published: 25 April 2025

ABSTRACT

The study sought to establish *Ensera Ayor* as a heroic epic of the Iban community that highlights the wisdom of the Iban ethnic group in the context of ethnocentrism as one of their key identities in facing the tide of technological advancement. There are five factors associated with ethnocentrism, which outline the main drivers behind its emergence in society: love for the homeland, loyalty between the ruler and the people, patriotism, honor, and religion.. This paper analyzed these five factors in *Ensera Ayor* and found that religion and honor dominate the narrative of this epic. This is because the narrative of *Ensera Ayor* aims to elevate religion, beliefs, and honor as the foundation that shapes the greatness of the ancient Iban society. This study found that literary works do not emerge from a void but are manifestations of the wisdom of authors and communities in strengthening their identity, excellence, and prestige in the eyes of other societies, including the present generation.

Keywords: *Ensera Ayor*, Ethnocentrism, Religion, Honor, Wisdom and Iban Community.

INTRODUCTION

Every nation in the world possesses its own classical literary works, whether in oral or written form. Classical literature is a valuable heritage left by past societies, serving as a reflection of their way of life. This reflection encompasses various aspects of life, including economics, politics, society, and culture, which shape their civilization. Therefore, literary works are not merely products of creativity but also function as social documents that record the realities of their time, making them an important source of reference for future generations. This perspective aligns with the view of Alan Swingewood ((1972:32), who asserts that literature can serve as a crucial document in understanding a society and its era.

“Clearly any literary sociology which bases itself as such clear cut as this—literature as source of information as documentation”.

The significance of literature as a cultural document is extensively acknowledged in global studies. Prominent scholars such as Edward Said (1978) in *Orientalism* and Benedict Anderson (1983), *Imagined Communities* emphasize the significance of literature in shaping and preserving national and cultural identity. In a broader global context, classical literary works are seen as records that document the collective wisdom of civilizations, influencing social structures and historical narratives across different regions. For instance, the Epic of Gilgamesh from Mesopotamia, The Iliad and The Odyssey from ancient Greece, and The Mahabharata from India all serve as testaments to the socio-political and philosophical ideas of their respective eras. These works not only reflect the values and beliefs of their time but also provide a foundation for contemporary discussions on identity and historical consciousness.

At the regional level, Southeast Asian literature has played a pivotal role in preserving cultural identities and historical narratives. Classical works such as the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* in the Malay world, *Ramayana Kakawin* in Javanese literature, and *Syair Perang Menteng* in the Malay-Indonesian literary tradition emphasize the heroism, struggles, and moral values embedded within their societies. Azhar Ibrahim (2017:20), further supports this view:

“We can see these narratives as cultural documents that recorded various strands of thought in society and can be one of the sources for our understanding of socio-cultural and economic history”.

This suggests that literary works serve as crucial records that document the cultural diversity of past societies, reinforcing their importance as historical and philosophical repositories. These works do not merely function as mediums for storytelling but also as primary sources for understanding political, social, economic, and historical aspects from the perspective of the society in which they were produced. This perspective further underscores the notion that classical literary works do not emerge in a vacuum; instead, they result from the wisdom of their authors, who act as recorders, scribes, pioneers, and even journalists of their time. At the local level, Iban oral literature, particularly *Ensera Ayor*, stands as a powerful representation of Iban identity, wisdom, and ethnocentric pride. The Iban community, as part of the indigenous groups in Borneo, has a rich tradition of oral literature that serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for transmitting values, history, and social structures. In this context, *Ensera Ayor* functions as a heroic epic that encapsulates the beliefs, pride, greatness, and heroism of the Iban people. Despite the rapid advancement of technology, the integrity of this text as a representation of identity, unity, and moral values remains preserved by its author. The uniqueness and resilience of these values cannot be replaced by modern science and technology. This demonstrates that, despite the rapid pace of technological change, the wisdom of past authors, as recorded in traditional literary works along with the philosophy they embody, remains relevant and cannot be undermined by the progression of time.

This study, titled *Ensera Ayor as a Reflection of Iban Wisdom on Ethnocentrism in Facing the Era of Technology*, aims to highlight the significance of this text as a symbol of identity and pride for the Iban community. By situating this discussion within global, regional, and local perspectives, the study reinforces the broader role of classical literature in preserving cultural and historical narratives while emphasizing the unique contributions of Iban oral tradition to the literary heritage of Southeast Asia.

Research Problem

The research problem stems from a review of previous studies conducted on the *Ensera Ayor* text. These past studies indicate that the text has garnered attention from various researchers, demonstrating its significance and enduring appeal despite being a work from the past. Several key studies on *Ensera Ayor* include the following:

Doratya Anak Gerry and Chemaline Anak Osup (2020), in their article published in the *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu (JOMAS)* titled *The Experiencing-Appreciating Method in Teaching the Iban Language Using Ensera (Kaedah Mengalami-Menghayati dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Iban dengan Menggunakan Ensera)*, conducted a study using qualitative methodology and field research. This study applied constructivist theory and moral theory to evaluate the effectiveness of using *Ensera* in teaching the Iban language in schools. The findings indicate that the text is not only beneficial for teachers in the teaching process but also for students, as it instils positive values in them.

A study by Noorasikin Binti Azis (2016), titled *Ayor: The Ugly Hero of Iban Folklore (Ayor Wira Hodoh Sastera Rakyat Iban)*, was conducted as part of a Master's degree requirement. In this research, Noorasikin employed the hero theory proposed by Bowra C. (1966), which outlines four key characteristics of a hero: (1) possessing extraordinary physical strength compared to those around them, (2) having an unusual birth accompanied by a remarkable event, (3) being involved in warfare, and (4) having an attractive physical appearance. The study concludes that the character Ayor in *Ensera Ayor* meets all the heroic traits outlined by Bowra.

Additionally, Noriah Taslim and Chemaline Osup (2013) authored a book titled *Ensera Ayor: The Iban People's Epic (Ensera Ayor: Epik Rakyat Iban)*, published by Universiti Sains Malaysia. This book is divided into five main chapters: (1) an introduction to the background of the Iban community, (2) *Leka Main* folk poetry in the Iban community, (3) *Ensera* as the Iban people's epic in Sarawak, (4) the *Ensera Ayor* text, and (5) the translated text of *Ensera Ayor* from Iban dialect to Malay Language, followed by a conclusion. The book suggests that its primary purpose is to connect the character of Ayor with the beliefs, culture, and sacred

myths of the Iban community.

Although various studies have been conducted on Ensera Ayor, a review of the literature reveals that no research has specifically examined the aspect of ethnocentrism within this text. Therefore, this study is essential to fill this gap and further enrich academic discourse on Ensera Ayor as an epic of the Iban community.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the Ensera Ayor: The Iban People's Epic (*Ensera Ayor: Epik Rakyat Iban*) manuscript, which was transliterated by Noriah Taslim and Chemaline Osup (2013). The discussion on Ensera Ayor: The Iban People's Epic (*Ensera Ayor: Epik Rakyat Iban*) is analysed using the content analysis method. This methodology is selected as it is suitable for analysing written documents, books, manuscripts, and texts. Given that *Ensera Ayor* is a written and published text, the use of this methodology is highly appropriate. The focus is placed on the intrinsic aspects of the manuscript to analyse elements of ethnocentrism in Ensera Ayor: The Iban People's Epic (*Ensera Ayor: Epik Rakyat Iban*) as a reflection of the author's wisdom.

To deepen the discussion, Graham Sumner's (1911) theory of ethnocentrism serves as the foundation of the analysis. According to the *Kamus Dewan* (Fourth Edition), ethnocentrism refers to the belief or attitude that one's own ethnic group or culture is superior to others. Meanwhile Graham Sumner (1911:13), defines ethnocentrism as the perception that one's own group is the centre of everything, while others are evaluated according to this perspective, and any differences from this central viewpoint are considered weaknesses. The definition provided in *Kamus Dewan* is relatively brief and leans toward a negative interpretation. However, Sumner extends the concept beyond merely asserting the superiority of one ethnic group over another. He also discusses ethnocentrism in terms of cohesion, solidarity, loyalty exceeding that of other groups, and the willingness to defend one's group from external threats (Sumner, 1911:37). Sumner's justification of ethnocentrism is supported by R. Suntharalingam and Abdul Rahman (1985:10), who assert that ethnocentrism serves as a driving force for nationalistic struggles, fostering patriotism, promoting national unity based on shared ancestry and culture, and encouraging resistance against foreign intrusion. Thus, the definitions provided by Sumner, as well as R. Suntharalingam and Abdul Rahman, are highly relevant to this study. Ethnocentrism emerges from an ethnic group as a societal unit possessing cultural sentiments, which encompass identity, myths, symbols, and a fixed communication code that serves to identify similarities and differences among groups.

Within the concept of ethnocentrism, religion is a fundamental and crucial factor. Religion functions as a symbolic code for communication and as a central organizing force, particularly in pre-modern societies. Additionally, religion plays a significant role in shaping and reinforcing ethnic sentiments that form the foundation of religiously based communities. This intersection between religion and ethnicity manifests in three interconnected aspects. First, there is a strong relationship between the mythological beliefs of an ethnic group and their religious views on creation and their place in the cosmos. Second, the rise of sectarian religions provides an appropriate space for the formation of ethnic communities based on religious identity. Third, well-structured religions offer the energy and communication channels necessary for disseminating ethnic symbols. These three factors are highly effective in unifying small traditions and cultural systems. They also facilitate the transmission of shared symbols such as festivals, rituals, myths, heroes, and religious leaders, alongside clear religious practices and regulations. Through this process, a sense of collective sentiment and shared aspirations is cultivated within the community. Likewise, religious and ethnic doctrines are expanded to accommodate the interests and needs of a particular group that is conscious of its history and cultural integrity.

Another crucial factor is the formation of unity bonds. The emergence of communal unity in response to external threats contributes to the creation of ethnic communities. Wars at various levels—whether involving families, empires, or political powers—have had profound effects on the formation and survival of ethnic identities. Regarding the role of unity in ethnocentrism, Smith asserts that several factors stimulate the emergence of solidarity in the face of external threats. Beyond the physical mobilization for war, the shared mythological heritage of an ethnic group plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of unity against external

threats. Similarly, propaganda and mobilization efforts for war, along with the political territorial structure, contribute to the sense of belonging and solidarity among ethnic members. This suggests that strong fraternal bonds within a community's settlement and its political relationships with neighboring groups often enhance ethnic consciousness.

Thus, it can be concluded that religion including myths and unity serve as the foundational pillars of ethnocentrism. These three interrelated elements will form the primary framework for the discussion in this paper.

DISCUSSION

The Iban community possesses a rich and distinctive folkloric tradition, which can be categorized into three main forms: oral folklore, semi-oral folklore, and non-oral folklore. Oral folklore among the Iban encompasses various forms of linguistic expression, conveyed entirely in the Iban language. These include personal or honorary titles, proverbs (*sempama*), figurative language (*jaku dalam*), riddles, (entelah, pantuns, jawang, ganu, ramban), and a variety of folktales known as Ensera. These elements not only serve as entertainment but also function as a medium for transmitting values, norms, and cultural teachings to future generations.

Semi-oral folklore, on the other hand, includes traditional beliefs (*pengarap asal*), folk games (*main asal*), and various forms of performing arts, such as the traditional *ngajat* dance, which is often associated with the customs and rituals of the *Gawai* festival. This category of folklore integrates both oral and non-oral elements, where verbal aspects are used to convey meaning and purpose in each cultural practice. Non-oral folklore within the Iban community comprises cultural heritage that is transmitted through practical and visual means. This includes architectural structures such as longhouses, traditional handicrafts, carvings, tattoos, traditional attire, ornaments, as well as traditional food and beverages. Although these elements do not rely entirely on verbal communication, they are still taught and passed down through speech and direct practice in daily life. All these aspects of folklore play a crucial role in shaping the identity of the Iban community and ensuring the continuity of their cultural heritage amidst the tides of modern change (Patricia, Ganing, Asmiaty Amat & Lokman Abdul Samad, 2020:7).

Ensera is an extensive Iban epic poem that narrates the struggles and contributions of heroes from various Iban subgroups. *Ensera Ayor* is a folk epic that originates from the oral tradition and is recited in the Iban language. The protagonist, Ayor, is regarded as a mythical hero from *Panggau-Libau*. In Iban belief, *Panggau-Libau* exists between the earth and the sky, a realm of perfection and beauty often referred to as *alam kayangan* (the celestial world) (Norah Taslim & Chemaline Osup, 2013: 42). Ayor's journey begins when he is abandoned in the forest by his mother due to his unattractive appearance. His odyssey unfolds as a narrative deeply rooted in the spirit of Iban ethnocentrism, emphasizing unity, camaraderie, and honor—values that form the foundation of Iban society.

Based on the definition of ethnocentrism, religion serves as a fundamental factor in its formation, as it functions as a symbolic code in communication. Among pre-modern societies, religion not only initiates but also strengthens ethnic sentiments, which serve as the foundation for the development of religion-based communities. Additionally, religion plays a crucial role in disseminating collective symbols such as customs, myths, heroes, and spiritual figures (Sumner, 1911: 35).

Although *Ensera Ayor* is an oral narrative, it is closely linked to the Iban community's belief in the *kayangan* (celestial realm). This story highlights the myths of heroes and heroines from the *Panggau-Libau* people, who are celestial beings believed to have aided the Iban people in wars and expeditions in ancient times. According to Iban beliefs, this world is inhabited by semi-divine beings and *petara* (supreme deities). They are led by Keling, alongside the serpent deity, who also plays a significant role in their mythology. The Iban believe that the longhouse of *Panggau-Libau* possesses extraordinary dimensions, with the *Chelali Laling* River flowing through its domain. This river is believed to have healing properties and magical qualities that bring various blessings to the community.

The *Ensera Ayor* text begins with the author's explanation that the story is set in the celestial world known as *Panggau-Libau*, ruled by Keling. This narrative reinforces the connection between myth and traditional Iban beliefs, making it more than just an oral tale but an integral part of a belief system that has been passed down through generations.

Aku nak menceritakan kisah orang Panggau Libau Yang kerap dikibar daun palma Aku nak mengisahkan tentang orang Selaku Munju Kedianan ular naga berbisa tiada tertawar Menurut Ensera dalam rahang nyawa Suatu ketika dahulu Kumang meluahkan Derita kepada suaminya Keling Gerasi Nading Bujang Raja Berani Mengidam nak makan buah mempelam masak (Ensera Ayor, 2013:162).

I want to tell the story of the people of *Panggau Libau*, Who are often swayed like palm leaves in the wind. I want to speak of the people of *Selaku Munju*, The dwelling place of the venomous dragon, untamed and fierce. According to the *Ensera*, within the jaws of fate, Once upon a time, Kumang poured out Her sorrow to her husband, Keling Gerasi Nading, the fearless warrior king, Who craved the taste of ripe mangoes.

Ensera Ayor begins its narrative by introducing the characters of Keling and Kuman, who are deities in Iban society. Kuman, who is pregnant, craves ripe mangoes. Keling and Kuman are not only husband and wife but also highly revered figures in Iban beliefs. Deities in this tradition are renowned for their greatness, agility, and striking appearance. Keling and Kuman are depicted as figures possessing extraordinary strength, supernatural abilities, handsome features, and exceptional beauty, surpassing those of ordinary humans. Besides Keling, the narrative of *Ensera Ayor* also features other characters such as Laja, Bungai Nuing, Lulong, and Pungga, who are also deities within the cosmology of Iban society. The primary setting of this tale is *Panggau Libau*, a divine village located in the sky, also known as the celestial realm. *Panggau Libau* serves as the boundary between the human world and the realm of deities. Despite this separation, the Iban people believe that deities frequently descend to earth when summoned, especially in times of need.

In terms of themes, *Ensera Ayor* not only highlights heroism but also emphasizes the dominance of religious and spiritual elements. This characteristic is not only evident in *Ensera Ayor* but also extends to Iban poetry and folklore in general. This oral tradition has developed alongside the Iban civilization, with oral literature being closely intertwined with a belief system that includes prayers, religious rituals, and incantations. Due to this close relationship between religion and literature, many poets and storytellers (*lemambang*) in Iban society are individuals with religious backgrounds. The strength of *Ensera Ayor* lies in its role as a symbol of the connection between ethnocentrism and religious beliefs within Iban society. In the face of modern technological challenges, this text remains relevant due to its uniqueness and grandeur, which cannot be replicated by technological advancements. Although traditional storytellers in Iban society are often illiterate in a formal, written sense, they are still highly respected for their authority and expertise. They must also undergo specific processes or rituals before being granted the responsibility of narrating stories to the community. Only individuals with high credibility and influence are accepted as narrators within their society. Therefore, *Ensera Ayor* is not only an important cultural heritage but also plays a vital role in preserving the identity and values of the Iban people amidst the currents of change.

Ensera Ayor also symbolizes the values of unity, harmony, and solidarity within Iban society. This sense of unity is evident in the storytelling tradition of *Ensera*, where the storyteller sings the tale while seated on a swing, while the audience in the longhouse continues their work, attentively listening to the narration. *Ensera* is also known as a work song because it serves an economic function—not only does it lighten the burden of labor, but it also encourages collective work within the community. This reflects the concept of unity among the audience, as storytelling itself strengthens bonds of kinship and fosters a spirit of mutual assistance. In this story, the value of unity in *Ensera Ayor* is depicted through Keling's advice to Bungai Nuing before embarking on a journey to search for *buah asam* for Kumang. This event highlights the importance of wisdom, compassion, and mutual support among individuals in ensuring collective well-being.

Maka ketiadaan kami nanti jagalah anak-anak buah kita disini kau pimpin mereka berhuma kau bawa merumput kau ajak bercucuk tanam kau gesa bersawah lading jika ada orang kita ada sakit dan rumit diharap kau berdua sokong dan lindungi dia jika wanira kita bertelingkah salah faham tersasul kata jika hanya

pertelagahan kecil sebesar telunjuk jangan dibesarkannya (Ensera Ayor, 2013:164).

Kerja buat perangkap ikan dan jerat haiwan serah sahaja kepada Ayor Semuanya terlaksana Sukanya ia tolong mereka hidup seperti satu keluarga begitulah kisah hidup Ayor memiliki berbagai kelebihan mahir kerja tangan dan pintar berfikir (Ensera Ayor, 2013:185).

So when we are no longer here, take care of our people in this place. Lead them in farming, guide them in clearing the fields, encourage them to plant, urge them to cultivate the land. If any of our people fall ill or face hardship, may both of you support and protect them. If our women quarrel, if misunderstandings arise and words are spoken in haste, if the dispute is as small as a finger's width, do not let it grow into something bigger.

As for making fish traps and animal snares, leave it to Ayor. Everything will be taken care of. Ayor is always happy to help them, living together like one family. Such is the life of Ayor, blessed with many talents—skilled in craftsmanship and wise in thought.

This excerpt illustrates the strong sense of unity within the Iban community, where individuals consistently support and assist one another. According to Roslina Abu Bakar (cited in Fatimah Md Yassin, 2014:3), folklore is a part of oral literature that has been passed down from generation to generation. The creative works of this community, which leads a simple life, serve the purpose of entertainment while also providing advice and education. Additionally, the *rumah panjang* (longhouse) is a symbol of the identity and cultural heritage of the Iban people. These longhouses are inhabited by relatives and extended family members, making them a tangible representation of the strong familial bonds and cooperative spirit within the Iban society.

The *rumah panjang* (longhouse) is not merely a place of shelter but also serves as a means of protection for its inhabitants against various threats, whether from humans or wild animals.

The architectural structure of the longhouse reflects the communal nature of its residents, allowing them to better defend themselves from attacks by wild animals and enemy invasions, particularly during *ngayau* expeditions (head hunter). In an environment constantly exposed to potential dangers, communal living in a longhouse provides not only security but also comfort.

Although occasional conflicts may arise, the spirit of family unity and the authority of tradition—through the guidance and advice of elders—often play a crucial role in resolving disputes. Within this social structure, most activities are carried out collectively. For instance, festivals or *gawai* (harvest festival that marks the end of the rice-growing season and is a time for giving thanks for a bountiful harvest while seeking blessings for the coming year) are not celebrated individually or by single families alone but as a communal event for the entire longhouse. During economic hardships or food shortages, this practice helps reduce expenses, as celebrations are conducted in a practical and reasonable manner (Noriah Taslim & Chemaline Osup, 2013: 4-5). Additionally, the *bilek* (room) system within the longhouse is a unique structure, with each room being occupied by a different family. From an economic perspective, the construction of longhouses is highly beneficial as it optimizes land usage. The land not occupied by the longhouse can be utilized for agricultural activities, aligning with the Iban community's strong inclination towards farming. Agriculture is not only a long-standing tradition among them but also serves as their primary source of income.

Ngayau, or headhunting, was a practice synonymous with the Iban community in the past. However, it is important to understand the purpose behind this practice, as no tradition evolves into a cultural norm without substantial reasons. According to Badriyah Haji Salleh (2000:51), the culture of headhunting among the Iban is deeply rooted in their belief in the close relationship between humans and spirits. The Iban hold a profound respect for the existence of spirits, which are believed to reside in the human head. This belief posits that the head is the seat of the soul, from which all life springs, and is thus considered the source of an individual's strength and spirit. Consequently, the Iban practiced headhunting, targeting their enemies—not arbitrarily, but with specific purposes. The more heads collected, the more spirits could be united, thereby strengthening the community's spiritual power. *Ngayau* is also closely associated with the concept of honor If

an individual or group within the Iban community was insulted or humiliated, they would seek retribution through warfare. Successfully bringing back the enemy's head symbolized the restoration of their tarnished honor. The greater the number of enemy heads a male Iban acquired, the higher his status within the longhouse. Such achievements could earn him esteemed titles like *Bujang Berani*, reflecting his bravery and prowess in battle. In the epic *Ensera Ayor*, the event of *ngayau* serves as an aggressive action to restore Keling's honor after being insulted by Jenung during captivity. In this headhunting expedition, they successfully exacted revenge against Jenung Sabung, Tungkai, and Bujang Ilang, thereby reinstating the honor of Keling and his group.

Ini sebabnya Hasrat kami Kerana dendam antara kami Kedua, kami berniat nak langgar Nak pungut bayaran hutang Kepada si Ayor dahulu kala Maka ada baik kalian semua Mengetahui ke mana kami pergi "Geram hatiku mendengar niat kamu bertiga Aku setuju turut serta.

Rakyat lelaki di rumah panjang itu semua setuju Nak turut serta dalam ekspedisi ngayau Kita ngayau bersama (Ensera Ayor, 2013:249). This is our intention, For the grudge between us. Secondly, we intend to attack, To collect an old debt From Ayor in the past.

So, it is best that all of you Know where we are going.

"My heart burns with anger hearing your intentions, I agree to join you."

All the men in the longhouse agreed, Eager to join the headhunting expedition. "We shall go headhunting together."

This excerpt on *ngayau* serves as both an explanation and a rebuttal to misconceptions, particularly among Westerners, regarding this practice. Before headhunting was banned under the Brooke administration, Borneo was once known as the 'land of head hunters'. From a historical perspective, the Iban people were often portrayed as fierce warriors who fought among themselves, supposedly due to conflicts over land and territory. From an ecological standpoint, they were forced to migrate frequently because their primitive agricultural techniques led to soil depletion, which in turn reduced agricultural yields. Their search for new lands often brought them into conflict with other groups who shared the same objective. James and Charles Brooke, the first and second White Rajahs of Sarawak, understood the culture and beliefs of the Iban people and exploited these conflicts for their own interests. They encouraged the Iban to wage war against each other and sided with the victorious group to expand their influence. However, *ngayau* in Iban society was rooted in spiritual beliefs rather than purely political or territorial ambitions.

Although *ngayau* involved warfare and headhunting, women and children were not killed. Instead, they were taken as captives or slaves, but their treatment was significantly better compared to slavery in other societies. In fact, some captives were even adopted into families through the *mengiru hamba abdi* ceremony (a ritual for adopting captives as family members). This ceremony formally recognized the captives as part of the adoptive family. Therefore, in Iban society, there was no permanent slave class, as all captives integrated through this ritual were given equal status and treatment as other family members.

Furthermore, this text also critiques the increasingly loose social interactions among Iban youth, where they behave in an impolite manner without any sense of shame. This contradicts the values of the Iban community, which places great importance on courtesy and decorum in social interactions. Classical literary works are not merely a form of entertainment but also play a crucial role as an educational tool within the society. They serve as a "teacher", educating and guiding the community in understanding noble values, traditions, and social norms that have been passed down through generations.

Bila ketawa, kuat berdekit-dekit mengekek selalu duduk, pikah kaki (cara duduk gadis yang tidak sopan, seperti bertingtung)Macam tak kisah dengan alat malu sendiri itulah perangai gelagat telatah remaja seangkatan zaman itu (Ensera Ayor, 2013:187).

Iban dahulu kala hidup berhuma begini dara hidup di Panggau Libau bermacam sara diri berbagai usaha

sibuk sentiasa setidaknya mencari kayu api jika tiada kayu api di rak dapur ia tanda lelaki malas berat tulang (Ensera Ayor, 2013:193).

When they laugh, it is loud and cackling, Always sitting with their legs spread (an improper way for a young girl to sit, like squatting), As if they have no sense of modesty, Such was the behaviours, mannerisms, and antics Of the youth of that time.

The Iban of old lived by shifting cultivation, This is how the maidens of *Panggau Libau* lived Engaging in various means of sustenance, Busy with all sorts of tasks, At the very least, gathering firewood. If there was no firewood on the kitchen rack, It was a sign of a lazy and idle man.

As future heads of families or *tuai rumah*, young Iban men are strictly discouraged from being lazy. Instead, they are encouraged to engage in activities that contribute to the household economy, such as collecting firewood, hunting, and undertaking other beneficial tasks. Hard work not only elevates their status within the longhouse community but is also considered one of the essential qualities, alongside bravery, for becoming a leader. The Iban people are the largest indigenous group in Sarawak. They traditionally reside in inland areas and near rivers, which serve as their primary means of transportation and an essential source of fish. Additionally, the Iban are highly skilled *padi huma* (hill rice) farmers. For them, agriculture is not merely an economic pursuit; it also holds deep social, spiritual, and religious significance. These three elements are intricately woven into their way of life and are expressed through various customary rituals. An Iban man who is lazy and unproductive in providing for his family is considered shameful. Therefore, in addition to being proficient in earning a livelihood, he is also expected to master practical skills such as repairing fishing nets, weaving baskets or mats, and performing other essential tasks that contribute to daily life.

The tradition of *ngayap* (visiting a maiden at night) is a customary practice among Iban young men and women. In this tradition, a young man visits the sleeping quarters of the woman he admires as an initial step in developing a romantic relationship. *Ngayap* takes place at night in a quiet and discreet manner, but it is not intended for sexual gratification. The intimacy fostered through this tradition allows the couple to get to know each other more deeply before progressing to marriage. As a result of *ngayap*, the marriage of the couple will be arranged by both families once they reach the age of 21 to 23.

Rungga dan Runggai terus bangun pergi Ngayap gadis idaman hati Rungga ngayap Lulong Runggai ngayap Kumang Pergi pula ngayap Indai Lipai (Ensera Ayor, 2013:240). Rungga and Runggai immediately got up and went, To ngayap the maidens of their hearts. Rungga ngayap Lulong, Runggai ngayap Kumang, Then they went to ngayap Indai Lipai.

This description illustrates the reunion between Keling and Kumang. Keling, who had embarked on a journey to find asam fruit for Kumang, never returned after the incident, leading Kumang to believe that he had died. After many years, Kumang finally prepared herself to undergo the *ngayap* tradition with another Iban suitor. However, unexpectedly, Keling, disguised as Rungga, *ngayap* into Kumang's room to reclaim his wife.

Ngayap is one of the unique traditions of the Iban community, which is no longer practiced by the modern generation. Although this custom has become merely a part of history, it serves as proof that the Iban people possess their own distinctive traditions that set them apart from other ethnic groups. This cultural uniqueness is one of the defining strengths of the Iban community and should be appreciated. *Ngayap* also reflects the ethnocentrism of the Iban people, which should be a source of pride not only for past generations but also for the Iban community today and in the future.

In general, Iban folklore reflects a close relationship between humans and animals. These stories depict that humans and animals can not only coexist but also marry and build families without being seen as unusual. In many tales, Iban warriors often encounter princesses who take the form of animals such as deer, fish, birds, and various other creatures. Whether the warrior marries the animal princess or receives guidance and magical charms from her, the bond between humans and animals is a significant element in Iban folklore. This relationship is illustrated through the character of Ayor, who was born with an ugly appearance

and was consequently ridiculed, insulted, and mocked by friends and villagers. Even his own mother rejected him. However, everything changed when he encountered a golden-antlered deer in a dream.

“Jika kau nak buka sarung badanmu Inilah manteranya:

Oh kau sarung cangkerang kulit Oh kau baju lapik ditutup ketat Tanggallah kau Membuka diri Melucutlah kau dari badan Ayor masih ingin bercakap dengan puteri Puteri bertukar menjadi asap Yang bewarna merah, kuning dan biru Kemudian lesap dari matanya Ayor terjaga dari tidur (Ensera Ayor, 2013:218).

"If you wish to remove your outer shell, Here is the chant:

Oh, you shell of hardened skin, Oh, you tightly wrapped covering, Shed yourself, Release yourself from the body.

Ayor still wished to speak with the princess, But she transformed into smoke, Colored red, yellow, and blue, Then vanished from his sight. Ayor awoke from his sleep."

This event illustrates the close relationship between humans and animals in Iban beliefs. Encounters with extraordinary animals or marriages between Iban warriors and princesses from the animal realm often bring fortune to the warriors and their longhouses. For instance, Ayor's meeting with the golden-antlered deer princess transformed his appearance from unattractive to extraordinarily handsome. This was the fortune he gained. Perhaps the underlying message is that the bond between humans and animals is never truly severed. These stories reflect the Iban worldview. They believe that the universe consists of three layers: one for humans, animals, and plants. The highest realm, the sky, is reserved for important spirits and *Sangalang Burung*. The second realm, the earthly world, is for the living, while the third realm belongs to the spirits of the dead. All beings—including humans, animals, and plants—possess spirits. These spirits exist within the essence of each being and reside in the earthly world, whereas the spirits of the deceased dwell in the third realm, known as *Sebayan* (Badriyah, 2000:53-54).

CONCLUSION

Ensera Ayor is one of the literary works of the Iban community that showcases the wisdom of its author in depicting their way of life. Although this story primarily circulates among the people, it successfully reflects the entirety of their daily activities. This is the greatness of classical literature, which remains unparalleled despite the advancements of modern technology. *Ensera Ayor* is not merely an epic but also contains noble values that serve as valuable lessons. The stories of the Iban community, whether in the form of epics or animal tales, have fostered a strong sense of unity within their longhouse communities. However, this situation has begun to change as traditional life is gradually eroded by modernization, which has also affected their cultural heritage. The decline of these traditions is not solely due to modernization but also to the absence of an audience and successors to preserve them. *Ensera Ayor* reflects the brilliance of its author in weaving an extensive narrative in poetic form. Unlike in Malay society, where epic stories are typically written by their authors, the Iban people memorize and orally transmit their epics. This text illustrates the aspirations of the rural Iban community, emphasizing the spirit of unity, mutual assistance, and their readiness to protect their people from oppression and injustice. These positive values define the excellence of *Ensera Ayor* and highlight the author's mastery in portraying ethnocentrism rooted in the beliefs and culture of the Iban people. The entire text integrates elements of faith, culture, and worldview, which serve as the foundation of their resilience in facing the challenges of modern technological advancements.

REFERENCES

1. Azhar Ibrahim. (2017). Historical Imagination and Cultural Responses To Colonialism and Nationalism: A Critical Malay(sian) Perspective. Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.
2. Badriyah Haji Salleh. (2000). "Sejarah Budaya Masyarakat Bumiputera Malaysia" dalam Sorotan Terpilih Dalam Sejarah Malaysia. Mahani Musa & Tan Liok Ee (peny). (2000). Pulau Pinang:

Pusat Pengajian Ilmu Kemanusiaan.

3. Dorati Anak Gerry & Chemaline Anak Osup (2020). Kaedah Mengalami-Menghayati Dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Iban Dengan Menggunakan Ensera. Jurnal Pengajian Melayu (JOMAS).eJournal UM <https://ejournal.um.edu.my ›file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/62228.pdf>. Accessed on July 1, 2024.
4. Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Edisi Keempat. <https://prpm.dbp.gov.my/cari1?keyword=etnosentrisme>. Accessed on July 1, 2024.
5. Noriah Taslim & Chemaline Osup. (2013). Ensera Ayor Epik Rakyat Iban. Pulau Pinang: Universiti Sains Malaysia.
6. Noorasikin Binti Azis (2016) “Ayor: Wira Hodoh Sastera Rakyat Iban”. Disertasi Ijazah Sarjana. Universiti Sains Malaysia: Pusat Pengajian Ilmu Kemanusiaan.
7. Patricia Ganing, Asmiaty Amat & Lokman Abdul Samad. (2020). Entelah Warisan dan Hubungannya dengan Kepercayaan Masyarakat Iban. Sabah: Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris & Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.
8. Roslina Abu Bakar. (2014). Interaksi Sosial dalam Penyampaian Cerita Rakyat Melayu. Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia.
9. R. Suntharalingam & Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail. (1985). Nasionalisme: Satu Tinjauan Sejarah. Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti.
10. Sumner, W.G. (1911). Folkways: A Study of The sociological Importance of Usages, Maners, Customs, Mores and Morals. Bostan: Ginn & Company Publishers.
11. Swingewood, Alan & Laurenson, Diana. (1972). The Sociology of Literature. Schocken Books: New York.