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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social harmony in *kèjhung* oral literature: An ethnographic study of madurese cultural attitudes

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ABSTRACT
Oral literature plays an important role in transmitting cultural values and shaping social relationships. In Madurese society, *kèjhung* expresses cultural attitudes through poetic and symbolic language. This study aimed to examine the representation of social harmony in *kèjhung* oral literature and its significance in Madurese cultural life. Employing a qualitative cultural ethnographic approach, data were collected from selected *kèjhung* lyrics, observations, interviews, and field documentation in Pamekasan and Sumenep Regencies, Indonesia. The data were analyzed using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach through semantic and existential interpretation. The study found three cultural attitudes that are tied to one another: keeping relationships harmonious, forgiving one another, and respecting others. Harmony showed up in dealings with relatives, friends, and neighbors. Forgiveness came through humility, a willingness to admit mistakes, and efforts to mend strained relationships. Respect, for its part, was seen in compassion toward those who are less well off and in openness to views that differ from one's own. Seen this way, social harmony turns out to be more than living side by side in peace. It is a relational cultural orientation, concerned with how social relationships are kept up, restored, and ethically governed. This study contributes to oral literary and cultural studies by highlighting *kèjhung* as a cultural medium that articulates communal ethics and reinforces social harmony in Madurese society.

Keywords: Cultural Attitudes; Ethnography; *Kèjhung* Oral Literature; Madurese Society; Social Harmony

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INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is an important form of cultural expression through which communities preserve collective experiences, communicate social expectations, and transmit cultural knowledge across generations (Anugrah et al., 2023). Its significance extends beyond aesthetic expression because oral literary practices connect verbal creativity with social identity, collective memory, and culturally situated ways of understanding human relationships. Syam et al. (2024) show that oral literature helps shape a community's identity and sustains it over time, while Djalius (2023) adds that oral texts should not be studied apart from the settings in which they are performed and the ways their culture is passed on. Similarly, Akhiroh et al. (2025) showed that the preservation of oral traditions is closely related to the maintenance of community identity amid social transformation. Anwar et al. (2023) further demonstrated that traditional cultural practices can sustain social cohesion through mutual trust, cooperation, and reciprocal relationships. These perspectives suggest that oral literature should be examined not merely as an inherited verbal artifact but also as a cultural practice through which communities articulate and negotiate the ethical foundations of collective life (Manggau et al., 2025).

Social harmony constitutes an important dimension of communal life because social relationships are continuously shaped by differences in interests, experiences, economic circumstances, and individual perspectives (Yanti et al.,2024). Seen this way, harmony is more than the absence of conflict. It is a cultural process that never quite stops, one in which people keep their relationships in good repair, acknowledge what they owe one another, and work through their differences. Anwar et al. (2023) identified mutual trust and reciprocal participation as important foundations of social cohesion in Indonesian communal traditions. Research on intangible cultural heritage has likewise demonstrated that collective cultural practices can strengthen community identity and shared emotional experiences, while Syam et al. (2024) highlighted the relationship between oral literary practices and social identification. Akhiroh et al. (2025) further emphasized that cultural continuity depends on the participation of community members in maintaining inherited traditions. Taken together, these studies indicate that harmonious coexistence is supported by culturally meaningful relationships and collective practices. Nevertheless, understanding how such relationships are represented through oral literary language requires closer attention to the ethical meanings embedded in particular cultural expressions (Wulandari & Widihastuti, 2024).

Within Indonesian society, oral literature reflects the diversity of local cultural orientations and provides a means of communicating social knowledge through culturally recognizable forms of expression. Traditional songs, poetic performances, and oral narratives are rarely meant to be only beautiful. Beneath their artistic conventions sit messages about what people owe one another, how responsibility gets shared, and how a person is supposed to act among others. Djalius (2023), writing on bakayat in West Sumatra, cautions that oral literature is best documented whole, meaning its texts, its performers, and the place where it is performed. Syam et al. (2024) bring the question to social identity through Dayak Kanayatn oral literature, and in their account literary traditions keep their meaning even while the cultural setting shifts around them. Akhiroh et al. (2025) come at it differently, looking at how communities hold on to their identities by practicing and handing down oral traditions, while Anwar et al. (2023) add that traditional practices can sustain cooperation and social cohesion locally. Put side by side, these studies point in one direction: oral literature should be treated as an expression rooted in culture, since its meaning cannot be pulled away from the social relationships and shared experience around its performance.

One form of oral literature that shows these relationships at work is *kèjhung*, a traditional Madurese poetic expression sung in a melodic voice and tied closely to many parts of community life. Its lyrics pass on cultural knowledge in several ways: sometimes as advice, sometimes as an invitation, sometimes through figurative language, and often as a picture of ordinary social experience. Utami et al. (2021) examined the speech functions and sociocultural contexts of Madurese *kèjhung* and found that directive expressions, particularly advice and invitations, constitute important communicative features. Their findings also identified harmony and cooperation among the social contexts associated with *kèjhung*. Extending this perspective, Utami et al. (2022) examined *kèjhung* as a medium of character education grounded in Madurese local wisdom, identifying religious, politeness, social, and cooperative values. Maulidiah et al. (2024) subsequently investigated cultural educational values in *kèjhung* through an ethnographic approach, focusing on family, social, and educational domains. Research on the representation of Islamic sociology in Madurese *kèjhung* has also identified its relationship with religious teachings and everyday social norms (Furqon, 2026). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that *kèjhung* is not merely a form of traditional entertainment but also a medium through which Madurese cultural expectations are expressed and communicated.

Despite these contributions, the existing scholarship presents an opportunity for a more focused examination of social harmony as a multidimensional cultural attitude represented in *kèjhung* oral literature. Lamiah et al. (2025) primarily examined speech functions and their sociocultural contexts. Maulidiah et al. (2024) identified cultural educational values across several domains of Madurese life, while Furqon (2026) explored religious and social meanings within *kèjhung*. Although these studies provide important foundations for understanding its cultural significance, they do not make the interconnected processes of maintaining harmonious relationships, restoring social bonds through forgiveness, and recognizing the dignity of others their central analytical framework. This distinction matters. Simply identifying social values does not explain how different ethical orientations, taken together, show the way a community understands living side by side in harmony. For that reason, this study does not stop at sorting out moral and educational values. What it traces instead is how social harmony gets voiced through cultural attitudes that are bound up with one another in Madurese oral literary expressions.

An ethnographic approach is an important methodological footing here, since the cultural meanings of oral literature cannot always be grasped through textual interpretation alone. There is a gap between what is said, how the community makes sense of it, and what can be seen in everyday social practice, and that gap can only be bridged when literary texts are read within the cultural settings where they live. Djalius (2023) himself shows that studying oral literary performances calls for combining observation, interviews, and textual documentation. Similarly, Maulidiah et al. (2024) employed ethnographic research to investigate cultural educational values embedded in *kèjhung*, while Utami et al. (2021) emphasized the relevance of social, cultural, situational, and ideological contexts in interpreting its communicative functions. Akhiroh et al. (2025) further illustrated the importance of community participation and cultural practice in understanding the continuity of oral traditions. Building upon these methodological insights, the present study integrates interpretations of *kèjhung* lyrics with interviews and field observations to investigate how expressions concerning kinship, reconciliation, and interpersonal respect are understood within Madurese social life. This integration allows social harmony to be examined as a culturally situated orientation rather than an abstract moral ideal.

The originality of this study lies in examining social harmony in *kèjhung* through three interconnected dimensions of Madurese cultural attitudes: maintaining harmonious

social relationships, practicing mutual forgiveness, and respecting the dignity and perspectives of others. These dimensions provide a more specific analytical focus than previous investigations of speech functions, character education, and general cultural values (Utami et al., 2021 & Maulidiah et al., 2024). The first dimension concerns the maintenance of relationships within everyday life, kinship networks, friendships, and neighborhood interactions. The second concerns forgiveness as an ethical response to mistakes and interpersonal tensions, while the third addresses the recognition of human dignity across economic differences and divergent opinions. These dimensions are consistent with broader scholarship highlighting the importance of mutual trust, community participation, and social identity in sustaining collective relationships (Anwar et al., 2023; Syam et al., 2024). However, rather than assuming that literary expressions directly determine social behavior, the present study investigates how these attitudes are represented in *kèjhung* and interpreted in relation to ethnographic evidence. Through this approach, social harmony is conceptualized as a relational cultural orientation involving the maintenance, restoration, and ethical recognition of interpersonal relationships (Alhadi & Masrukhi, 2026) .

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how social harmony is represented in *kèjhung* oral literature and how these representations express Madurese cultural attitudes toward interpersonal relationships. Specifically, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How does *kèjhung* represent the maintenance of harmonious relationships in everyday life, kinship, friendship, and neighborhood interactions? (2) How is mutual forgiveness articulated as a cultural attitude toward restoring and sustaining social relationships? and (3) How does *kèjhung* represent respect for human dignity, economic differences, and diverse opinions?

These questions extend previous investigations of *kèjhung* as a communicative and educational medium (Utami et al., 2021 & Maulidiah et al., 2024) while engaging with wider discussions concerning oral literature, cultural identity, and communal cohesion (Syam et al., 2024). Theoretically, this study seeks to contribute to oral literary and cultural studies by interpreting social harmony as a multidimensional relational orientation expressed through culturally situated poetic language. Empirically, this study offers an ethnographically grounded reading of Madurese cultural attitudes, drawing together literary texts, what community members have to say, and observations made in the field. Its wider contribution is to show that oral literature can open a way into the cultural

understandings that hold up peaceful coexistence, a sense of social responsibility, and the continuity of relationships within a community.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a cultural ethnographic design to investigate social harmony in *kèjhung* oral literature as a representation of Madurese cultural attitudes. The research was conducted in Madurese communities in Pamekasan and Sumenep Regencies, East Java, Indonesia. The primary data were ten *kèjhung* lyric excerpts chosen because they voice social harmony. The selection was purposive, based on how closely each excerpt spoke to three dimensions of Madurese cultural attitudes: keeping relationships harmonious, forgiving one another, and showing respect to others. Supporting data came from interviews with traditional performers, cultural practitioners, and community members, meant to place the meanings of these lyrics within Madurese social life.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, audio recordings, and field documentation. The researcher was the main instrument, helped along by observation guidelines, interview protocols, and recording devices. The lyrics gathered in the field were then transcribed, identified, selected, and sorted by how they related to social harmony. Ethnographic observations and interviews were used to contextualize the meanings of the lyrics within Madurese social and cultural practices.

Data were analyzed using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach through semantic and existential interpretation. This interpretive framework enabled the researcher to examine textual meanings and relate them to broader cultural experiences, consistent with the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics in interpretive research (Rosidin & Andriani, 2022). Semantic interpretation was used to look at the linguistic expressions, symbolic meanings, and cultural messages carried in the *kèjhung* lyrics. Existential interpretation then tied those meanings back to the social experiences and cultural attitudes of Madurese communities. In practice, the analysis went step by step: the data were first identified, then categorized, interpreted, and finally synthesized. The aim was to explain how social harmony shows up in interpersonal relationships, forgiveness, and mutual respect. To keep the findings trustworthy, the researcher used source triangulation. Interpretations of the lyrics were checked against the interviews, the observation notes, and the views of Madurese cultural practitioners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that social harmony in Madurese *kèjhung* oral literature comes through in three attitudes that hang together: keeping relationships harmonious, forgiving one another, and respecting others. Taken together, they show how these poetic expressions convey what people are expected to do in their dealings with each other and what they owe the community. Harmony here is not pictured simply as a state of affairs worth wanting. It appears as an ethical orientation, one that asks people to tend their relationships, set right the wrongs they have done to others, and recognize the dignity of those around them. The findings are grouped into three thematic categories drawn from the selected lyrics and read alongside the ethnographic evidence.

1. Social Harmony as a Foundation of Madurese Communal Life

The discussion should interpret and critically analyze the findings by relating them to the research objectives, theoretical framework, and relevant previous studies. It should highlight the originality, significance, and implications of the findings, while explaining agreements, contradictions, or new insights in comparison with existing literature.

Harmony in Everyday Life

The importance of maintaining peaceful relationships is explicitly expressed in the following *kèjhung* lyric:

> *"Namen maghi' ma' tombu sokon, namen tarnya' mon tarnya'na bhiru-bhiru. Pong-pong odi' maḍḍhâ pa rokon, pong-pong odi' maḍḍhâ' parokon, bilâ ènga' jhâman sè dhâllu"*
> (Planting seeds that grow into breadfruit trees, planting vegetables that flourish green. While we are still alive, let us live in harmony; let us preserve our togetherness as we remember the days gone by).

The expression *"pong-pong odi'"* (while we are still alive) places social harmony within the limited duration of human life. In this lyric, harmonious relationships are not offered up as some lofty moral principle. Listeners are pointed instead to something nearer at hand: the chance to nurture a relationship that matters is today's, not tomorrow's. The call *maḍḍhâ pa rokon* (let us live in harmony) strengthens that message, since living together in peace turns out to demand a deliberate resolve. Harmony, then, is better described as a cultural responsibility that must be worked at, not something that shows up on its own just because people happen to share a community.

The mention of earlier times adds another layer: collective memory. To look back is to acknowledge relationships that have endured because the people in them went through so

much together. The lyric seems to counsel against letting a bond go over a passing quarrel, especially when those involved have long shared their lives. In the opening lines there is also the picture of plants growing, which connects planting with keeping something going. Plants have to be tended if they are to grow. Relationships are the same: they need attention to stay meaningful. This reading fits with scholarship that stresses the link between oral literature, cultural identity, and the continuity of a community.

This interpretation corresponds with scholarship emphasizing the relationship between oral literature, cultural identity, and communal continuity. Syam et al. (2024) demonstrate that oral literature contributes to the expression and maintenance of social identity, while Anwar et al. (2023) identify reciprocal relationships and mutual trust as important foundations of community cohesion. In the present finding, *kèjhung* communicates a similar concern through a direct invitation to preserve relationships. Its distinctive contribution lies in presenting harmony as an ethical obligation grounded in an awareness of life's transience and the value of shared experience.

Harmony among Family Members and Relatives

The significance of kinship is further expressed in data *kèjhung*. These lyrics position harmonious relationships among relatives as an important foundation of Madurese communal life.

> *"Perrèng pettong nèng sasanga', mellè lèmbur sè terro ompalla palotan. Sala sèttong ma' ghântèng pa ènga', nyopprè lèbur ma' sè atarètan".* (Nine bamboo sticks are gathered together, buying food to be mixed with sticky rice. Remind the handsome young man so that relationships among relatives remain harmonious).

The phrase *"sè atarètan"* refers to relationships of kinship and brotherhood. Its presence in the lyric suggests that family relationships are not understood as blood ties alone. They are seen as social bonds that call for attention and care. The expression pa ènga' (remind) deserves a closer look, since through it the act of reminding others is placed as a culturally accepted kind of interpersonal responsibility. People are encouraged to keep relationships intact not only by how they behave themselves, but also by advising others to steer clear of quarrels that did not need to happen.

Kinship in this context is not only a matter of emotional closeness. It also brings expectations that people will support one another, stay loyal, and take responsibility. The lyric conveys that harmonious relationships do not hold by themselves but have to be kept up through deliberate behavior. This fits with Anwar et al. (2023), who point to reciprocity

and social trust as important ingredients of community cohesion. Still, the *kèjhung* expression offers a more distinctive cultural angle, since looking after kinship is treated here as a responsibility that can be passed along through poetic advice.

> *"Abèca'an tor-taantor, ngalèbâdhi patamanan. Sakanca'an kodhu akor, bilebbi satarètanan".* (Riding a pedicab and repeatedly bumping along the way, passing through the garden. Friends must live in harmony, especially those who are relatives).

The expression *"sakanca'an kodhu akor"* (friends must live in harmony) establishes a clear behavioral expectation. The word *"kodhu"* (must) conveys obligation rather than preference. Harmony is therefore not presented as an optional expression of goodwill but as a social responsibility. The subsequent phrase *"bilebbi satarètanan"* (especially among relatives) strengthens this expectation by emphasizing the importance of kinship relationships.

Interestingly, the lyric does not keep friendship and family apart. It treats them as one continuous line. People are expected to keep the peace with their friends, but with relatives the obligation runs even deeper. This wording suggests that Madurese cultural attitudes toward social relationships are arranged according to how close people are to one another, without dismissing relationships outside the family. The lyric also hints that relationships can come under strain, which is why they have to be looked after on purpose. Seen ethnographically, expressions like this offer a way into how Madurese communities spell out what they expect of one another in terms of solidarity and conduct.

Harmony with Friends and Neighbors

The importance of getting along does not stop with family. It reaches friends and the people who live right next door. In Madurese community life, neighbors have a sizable place. They are the ones caught up in daily give-and-take, and when trouble comes, it is often they who can be asked for help first. Expectations like this are voiced in Data.

> *"Torè parokon rèng akanca ma' bân tatangghâna, lè salamet odi' è dunnya".* (Let us live harmoniously with friends and neighbors so that we may live safely and peacefully in this world).

The word *torè* (let us) brings in harmony as an invitation, not an order handed down from above. The choice is not a small one, since it draws everyone into taking part. The lyric does not leave the burden of living in peace on one person's shoulders. It calls on the whole community to look after these relationships together. The expression *"lè salamet odi' è dunnya"* connects social harmony with a sense of safety and well-being in everyday life.

This relationship between harmony and well-being suggests that peaceful coexistence is understood as a practical necessity. People lean on their social surroundings for emotional support, for a helping hand, and for a place in communal activities. Keeping good relationships, then, helps hold everyday life steady. Read this way, the lyric presents harmony as a shared responsibility rooted in how much people depend on one another.

> *"Namen maghi' tombu sokon, tabing kerrep nya' kalana. Orèng oḍi' kodhu rokon, salamet pola tèngkana"*. (Planting seeds that grow into breadfruit trees, a tightly woven wall where scorpions gather. People must live in harmony and conduct themselves properly).

The expression *"orèng oḍi' kodhu rokon"* (people must live in harmony) reinforces the normative character of peaceful coexistence. Unlike the invitation expressed in this lyric presents harmony as an obligation associated with proper social conduct. The subsequent phrase *"salamet pola tèngkana"* connects harmonious living with the regulation of individual behavior. It suggests that relationships are protected not only through good intentions but also through the ability to control actions that may offend or harm others.

Ethnographic evidence from Polagan Village backs up the relevance of these lyrical messages to how locals understand social relationships. At the *kèjhung* performance we observed, residents of different ages gathered, mingled, and pitched in to get the event ready. The occasion left room for casual conversation and shared participation. None of this proves that the performance itself produced social harmony. What can be said is that *kèjhung* was performed in a setting that made communal interaction possible.

Siswaji, the village head of Polagan, also stressed how much neighborhood harmony matters, in an interview on July 24, 2025. As he explained it, when relationships are harmonious, community members can face shared needs and hardships together, while without harmony the chance of division grows. His account strengthens the reading that harmony is understood as more than peaceful interaction: it is also a condition that supports cooperation and mutual help. These findings line up with Anwar et al. (2023), who underline the importance of trust, reciprocity, and collective participation in sustaining community cohesion. Research on Indonesian local traditions also high lights the role of culturally transmitted values in encouraging social responsibility and communal participation (Agriawan et al., 2023; Lamiah et al., 2025). They also extend the observations of Utami et al. (2021), who identify advisory expressions and sociocultural contexts as significant features of *kèjhung*. In the present study, the relationship between verbal expression and ethnographic context suggests that *kèjhung* communicates an ethic

of social interdependence. Its lyrical messages encourage individuals to understand their well-being as closely connected with the quality of relationships they maintain.

2. Mutual Forgiveness as a Cultural Mechanism for Restoring Social Relationships

The second finding has to do with mutual forgiveness, a cultural attitude that helps relationships recover. Where the first category is about how harmonious relationships are kept intact, this one turns to the moments when they get disturbed, whether by mistakes, misunderstandings, or behavior that was out of line. The selected lyrics represent apologizing as an expression of humility and an effort to prevent personal mistakes from developing into prolonged social tensions.

> *"Motor konèng ma' dâri ḍâja, es cop talèna mèra. Mator onèng tarètan sadhâjâ, sala lopot nyo'on sapora".* (A yellow vehicle comes from the north, with a red cord attached. To all my brothers and sisters, I ask forgiveness for any mistakes or shortcomings).

The expression *"sala lopot nyo'on sapora"* communicates a willingness to apologize for mistakes or shortcomings. What gives it weight is the recognition that anyone can offend another person without meaning to, whether through words or through deeds. In this lyric, apologizing is seen as a proper answer to the fact that people are imperfect. It is not a sign that someone is lowering themselves. This reading also rejects the old idea that guarding one's dignity means being unwilling to own up to a mistake.

The phrase "*tarètan sadhâjâ"* (all brothers and sisters) broadens the audience of the apology. The emphasis on apologizing and preserving interpersonal relationships can be understood in relation to forgiveness within collectivistic cultural contexts. Kurniati et al. (2017, 2020) demonstrated that forgiveness is closely associated with relational concerns and the cultural importance of maintaining harmonious interactions. Although their studies examined different Indonesian cultural settings, their findings provide a useful comparative perspective for interpreting forgiveness in *kèjhung*. By addressing others in the language of kinship, the expression builds a feeling of belonging to the same group. Forgiveness here does not stand alone but sits inside a larger responsibility to look after social relationships. The speaker is aware that his or her own conduct can affect others, and so declares a readiness to mend understanding between them.

> *"Pangapora mellèya penjhung, pamolena lèbât Sorbhâjâ. Pangapora kaulâ ngèjhung, sala lopot nyo'on sapora".* (Excuse me, I am going to buy penjhung and will return through Surabaya. Please excuse me for singing *kèjhung*; I ask forgiveness for any mistakes).

The repeated use of *"pangapora"* (excuse me or forgive me) introduces a distinctive communicative function. In this lyric, the expression is associated with the act of performing *kèjhung* itself. The performer greets the audience while allowing for the chance that some word or expression in the performance may strike listeners as improper. Apologizing, in this sense, is a form of consideration for others that is already built into the oral performance itself.

This finding matters because it shows that forgiveness in *kèjhung* does not come up only as a reply to a conflict that has already happened. Forgiveness also holds a fairly large place in the wider social and religious practices of Indonesia. Marimbun et al. (2026) examined forgiveness in relation to social integration during *halal bihalal*, while Suwarno (2018) discussed the role of forgiveness discourse in peacebuilding. These perspectives help contextualize the apologetic expressions found in *kèjhung*, although the present study specifically emphasizes their communicative and cultural meanings within oral performance. An apology of this kind can also work as preventive etiquette. The speaker first admits that what is said may give offense. From there a tone of respect takes hold, and misunderstanding becomes less likely. The lyric shows how one plain expression can hold humility and, at the same time, protect the dignity of everyone present. Read hermeneutically, the meaning of *pangapora* turns out to reach past its literal job as an apology. Within the performance, it also signals awareness of the bond between performer and audience. The speaker does not think of himself or herself as free to say anything at all without a thought for others. The performance starts instead from an acknowledgment that art is voiced amid a web of social expectations.

This interpretation develops the findings of Utami et al. (2021), who emphasize the sociopragmatic functions of *kèjhung*, particularly the role of expressions in communicating advice and social expectations. It also complements Maulidiah et al. (2024), whose study identifies cultural educational values in *kèjhung*. The present findings provide a more specific explanation of how expressions of apology can communicate relational responsibility.

Nevertheless, the available lyrical evidence primarily demonstrates the cultural significance of apologizing and requesting forgiveness. It does not independently establish that every apology results in actual reconciliation. The stronger conclusion supported by the data is that *kèjhung* represents apology as an ethically valued practice through which individuals seek to preserve or restore harmonious relationships. Taken together, Data suggest that mutual forgiveness occupies an important position within the cultural

representation of social harmony. The willingness to acknowledge mistakes, lower personal pride, and consider others' feelings provides an ethical foundation for maintaining relationships despite interpersonal imperfections. In this sense, forgiveness is represented as a relational practice through which social bonds may be protected from unnecessary deterioration.

3. Respect for Others as an Expression of Social Equality and Cultural Ethics

The third finding concerns respect for others as an essential dimension of social harmony. Unlike the previous categories, which emphasize maintaining relationships and addressing interpersonal mistakes, this dimension focuses on how individuals should treat others despite differences in economic circumstances and personal opinions. The selected *kèjhung* lyrics criticize attitudes of superiority and communicate the importance of recognizing others as members of a shared social community.

Respect for Economically Disadvantaged People

Respect for economically disadvantaged individuals is explicitly represented in Data *kèjhung.* The lyric warns against dismissing or mistreating others because of their limited material resources.

> *"Jhâ' mina'an pak sèrè sè candi', nabbhu tong-tong ma' cè' jhâunah. Jhâ' nyiya'an orèng ta' anḍi', tako' ta' ontong jhuḍhuna".* (Do not mistreat those who have little, for someone you disregard today may one day become your life partner).

The central expression *"jhâ' nyiya'an orèng ta' anḍi'"* (do not mistreat those who have little) communicates a direct prohibition against discrimination based on economic circumstances. The lyric challenges the tendency to evaluate individuals according to their material possessions. Instead, it encourages listeners to recognize that economic disadvantage does not diminish a person's worth.

The mention of a marriage that might happen someday raises an ethical argument worth noticing. The lyric seems to say that a person who is looked down on today could one day come to mean a great deal to us. Listeners are therefore asked to rethink judgments that rest only on how things stand now. Part of the message depends on an awareness that relationships, and people's fortunes, never stay fixed. The expression doubles as a rebuke to arrogance and snap judgment. At a deeper level, the lyric shows a concern for dignity between people. The ban on mistreatment does not stop at the chance of some personal gain later on. Within the wider set of selected findings, it also feeds an

ethic of social recognition, in which no one should be shut out because of economic differences. This reading ties respect for others to the prevention of social tension that grows out of humiliation and unequal treatment.

> *"Pèrèng cangkèr lem lomarè, è sabâ' ètata marè. Oreng mèskèn kanèserrè, atana' asella arè"*. (Plates and cups are arranged neatly in the cupboard. Show compassion for those living in poverty, who struggle to prepare their meals under the heat of the sun).

The expression *"oreng mèskèn kanèserrè"* calls for compassion toward people experiencing poverty. The image that follows, of preparing food under the sun, shows hardship through a very ordinary task tied to getting by from day to day. The lyric does not frame poverty as a personal failing. Its attention goes instead to the difficulties borne by people who have little to work with. The word *kanèserrè* deserves a closer look, since it carries a note of compassion toward another person's circumstances. Within the interpretation supported by the ethnographic material, compassion involves more than feeling sorry for someone. It also implies treating others with consideration and refraining from humiliating them because of their economic position.

This understanding was supported by field observations in Kaduara Barat Village, Larangan District, Pamekasan Regency. During the observed *kèjhung* performance, residents from different economic backgrounds gathered and participated in communal interactions. The field notes record people sitting together, talking, and joining in the activities around the performance, with no one visibly pushed to the margins because of their economic standing. These observations link the values in the lyrics to the social setting in which *kèjhung* was performed. Even so, they cannot be read as proof that economic inequality is absent from Madurese society. What they show is one observed situation in which people took part together across economic differences.

These findings are consistent with the broader relationship between cultural participation and communal cohesion discussed by Anwar et al. (2023). Studies of oral traditions have also highlighted their role in communicating moral values and sustaining socially meaningful practices (Manggau et al., 2025; Yanti et al., 2024). In *kèjhung*, this function is reflected in expressions encouraging compassion toward economically disadvantaged individuals. They also extend the cultural educational perspective of Maulidiah et al. (2024) by identifying respect for economically disadvantaged individuals as a distinct component of social harmony. The contribution of *kèjhung* lies in

communicating this ethical expectation through familiar language and images of everyday hardship.

Respect for Differing Opinions

Respect for others is also represented through attitudes toward differences of opinion. Data *kèjhung* emphasizes the importance of avoiding the imposition of personal views and recognizing the value of listening to others.

> *"Mon pa'empa' sè perrèng talè, nem ennem ḍâun marongghi. Mon ta' teppa' torè jhâ' calè, ala mon senneng pèrengngaghi".* (If four bamboo pieces are tied together and six moringa leaves are gathered, do not insist on what is inappropriate; listen when another opinion is worth considering).

The expression *"mon ta' teppa'"* (if it is not appropriate or correct) introduces the possibility that an individual's judgment may be mistaken. This recognition is significant because it challenges the assumption that maintaining one's position necessarily demonstrates strength or authority. The lyric instead encourages reflection before insisting on a particular opinion. The phrase *"torè jhâ' calè"* communicates a warning against forcing an inappropriate position upon others. The following expression, *"pèrengngaghi"* (listen), places listening at the center of respectful interaction. In this context, listening is more than a communicative technique; it represents a willingness to acknowledge that others may possess relevant experiences, knowledge, or perspectives.

The lyric therefore distinguishes between expressing an opinion and imposing it. This interpretation can be situated within broader studies of local cultural traditions that emphasize the transmission of socially responsible behavior (Lamiah et al., 2025). In the present study, however, the distinctive finding concerns the representation of respectful disagreement through poetic advice. People can hold on to their convictions and still accept that disagreement has a legitimate place. The distinction matters for social harmony, since tension between people often comes not from differing views as such but from a refusal to take other views seriously. The picture of respectful disagreement also widens what cultural attitudes in kèjhung can mean. Harmony does not ask everyone to think alike. What it asks for is the ability to keep relationships going in spite of differences. The lyric suggests that disagreement feels less threatening when people show restraint and stay willing to listen.

This interpretation complements the findings of Utami et al. (2021), who identify advisory expressions as an important communicative feature of *kèjhung*. It also develops

the cultural values discussed by Utami et al. (2022) and Maulidiah et al. (2024). Whereas these studies establish the importance of local wisdom and social values, the present finding illustrates a specific communicative ethic through which differences of opinion can be addressed without necessarily damaging interpersonal relationships. The significance of Data *kèjhung* is therefore not limited to politeness in conversation. What shows through here is an understanding of respect as acknowledging that another person is able to make a real contribution to social interaction. On this reading, harmony is not kept up by silencing disagreement. It is kept up by handling differences with consideration, restraint, and openness.

4. The Interrelationship of Social Harmony, Forgiveness, and Respect

The three categories of findings turn out to form a pattern that holds together in how Madurese cultural attitudes are represented. Keeping relationships harmonious stresses that social bonds need looking after. Mutual forgiveness answers the chance that those bonds weaken through mistakes or misunderstandings. Respect for others, meanwhile, gives an ethical footing for dealing with people across differences in economic standing and outlook. Read this way, the three are complementary values rather than separate ones. Harmony is about how relationships carry on, forgiveness about how they can be restored, and respect about how people are treated within them. Together, they provide an interpretive framework for understanding social harmony as a relational cultural orientation represented in *kèjhung* oral literature.

This interpretation offers a more focused contribution than the general identification of social and educational values in earlier *kèjhung* research. Utami et al. (2021) demonstrate the importance of communicative functions and cultural contexts, while and Maulidiah et al. (2024) emphasize the educational significance of cultural values. The present analysis connects selected expressions into a broader explanation of how relationships are maintained, potentially repaired, and regulated through ethical recognition.

The ethnographic observations also show why *kèjhung* should not be studied purely as a written text. Performances give people a reason to come together and take part, while interviews reveal how participants see the importance of keeping relationships in good order. The link between lyrical expression and performance context supports reading *kèjhung* as oral literature and, at the same time, as a practice rooted in its own social setting. Even so, the gap between literary representation and actual social behavior still

matters. The lyrics voice ideals about harmony, forgiveness, and respect. The interviews and observations only offer contextual evidence that those ideals are relevant to the people concerned. These sources do not establish that every member of Madurese society consistently practices the attitudes represented in the lyrics. Instead, they demonstrate the cultural expectations articulated through *kèjhung* and the ways these expectations can be interpreted in relation to communal experiences.

The findings also contribute to broader discussions of oral literature and cultural identity. Syam et al. (2024) emphasize the relationship between oral literary traditions and social identity, while Anwar et al. (2023) demonstrate the importance of social relationships and reciprocal participation in communal cohesion. The present study adds a more specific perspective by showing how a Madurese oral literary tradition represents harmony through obligations toward relatives, friends, neighbors, economically disadvantaged individuals, and people holding different opinions. Accordingly, the principal contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing social harmony in *kèjhung* as a relational cultural orientation involving three interrelated processes: maintaining relationships, seeking their restoration through forgiveness, and recognizing the dignity of others. This interpretation highlights the significance of oral literary expressions as sources for understanding how a community communicates its expectations of peaceful coexistence.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that social harmony in *kèjhung* oral literature comes through in three cultural attitudes that are tied to one another: keeping relationships harmonious, forgiving one another, and respecting others. The first attitude stresses that peaceful relationships need looking after in daily life, above all with relatives, friends, and neighbors. The second highlights forgiveness as an expression of humility and a means of preventing interpersonal misunderstandings from developing into prolonged conflicts. The third reflects the importance of recognizing human dignity by showing compassion toward economically disadvantaged individuals and respecting differences of opinion. Together, these findings demonstrate that social harmony in *kèjhung* is expressed not merely as an ideal of peaceful coexistence but as a cultural responsibility embedded in interpersonal relationships.

These findings also point to *kèjhung* as a vessel for voicing and passing on Madurese cultural attitudes, be it through poetic language, symbolic expressions, or advice heavy

with cultural meaning. When the lyrics are read together with ethnographic evidence, the picture of how social harmony is conveyed in Madurese cultural life becomes more grounded. The main contribution of this study lies in seeing social harmony as a relational cultural orientation, one that covers keeping social bonds intact, restoring relationships through forgiveness, and recognizing the dignity of others. From this standpoint, *kèjhung* is no longer viewed only as an art form to be enjoyed and entertained by. It can also be read as an oral literary expression of shared ethics, social responsibility, and cultural identity.

This study has its limits. Its data come only from a handful of selected *kèjhung* lyrics and ethnographic evidence gathered in particular Madurese communities. Its findings are therefore best understood as interpretations that grew out of one cultural setting, not as a picture of how all Madurese people think. Later research could ask whether social harmony is represented and understood differently, say across performance contexts, between generations, or from one Madurese community to another. Comparative work with other oral literary traditions in Indonesia could also widen our understanding of how local cultural expressions convey ethical principles for keeping social relationships intact. Research of this kind would add to oral literary and cultural studies, while also supporting the documentation and preservation of traditional cultural knowledge.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

This study followed the ethical principles that guide qualitative and ethnographic research. Data were gathered through observation, interviews, and documentation of Madurese *kèjhung* oral literature. All through the fieldwork, the dignity, privacy, and cultural values of the participants were upheld. Whatever they shared went toward academic purposes only, and their cultural knowledge and experiences were portrayed carefully so that they were represented fairly.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that OpenAI's ChatGPT was used to assist in drafting, organizing, and refining sections of the manuscript, including academic language development, literature synthesis, and the presentation of research findings and discussions. The AI-assisted content was developed using the research data and materials provided by the authors. The authors are responsible for verifying all interpretations, references, and statements and retain full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, integrity, and validity of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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