



# The Semiotic Landscape of Maritime Resilience: A Peircean Analysis of the Nandong Syair Perahu in Simeulue Island, Aceh

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## Abstract

The vast Indonesian archipelago, local oral traditions serve as crucial cognitive frameworks for preserving ancestral ecological wisdom and managing socio-environmental risks. On the isolated island of Simeulue, the *Nandong* oral performance represents a vital cultural institution, yet its specialized maritime sub-genre, the *Syair Perahu* (Boat Poem), has remained largely unexamined at a fine level of linguistic granularity. This study aims to deconstruct the semiotic mechanisms of the *Syair Perahu* to understand how physical maritime elements and natural phenomena are assigned practical, survival-based cultural meanings. Using a descriptive qualitative ethnographic design, this research systematically analyzes the transcribed oral verses of the poem through the application of Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic model (Representamen, Object, and Interpretant). Primary data were gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews with three respected *seniman tutur* (oral artists) in Simeulue. The findings demonstrate that the *Syair Perahu* operates as an active, secular cognitive map and safety manual. Specific linguistic signs, such as local timber (*kayu kapo-kapo*) and hydrodynamic forms (*ransung saladang*), are indexically linked to structural durability and strict passenger capacity limits. Similarly, environmental hazards like the *angin sumadin* and *lauik api* function as indexical warnings that trigger social safety rules and spiritual invocation, while the capturing of *samen-samen* fish symbolizes economic self-sufficiency. Ultimately, this study implies that endangered oral literatures are sophisticated educational systems of maritime resilience, highlighting the urgent need for regional heritage bodies to integrate ancestral ecological wisdom into modern coastal safety policies.

**Keywords:** Nandong, Peircean Semiotics, Simeulue Island, Syair Perahu, Maritime Resilience

## Introduction

The field of maritime anthropology and linguistic ethnography, oral traditions have long been recognized as vital systems for preserving and transmitting indigenous ecological knowledge, social norms, and historical memories within coastal and small island communities (Fernández-



Llamazares et al., 2021; Kitolelei et al., 2021). For centuries, isolated island communities have relied on verbal arts to navigate not only the physical challenges of their marine environments but also the complex socio-cultural transformations within their societies (Nunn et al., 2024). Within the vast Indonesian archipelago, which contains thousands of inhabited islands, local oral literatures serve as the primary medium through which cultural identity, ethical codes, and adaptive survival strategies are preserved and passed down through generations (Firdaus, 2025). In regions characterized by physical isolation, such as the outer islands of Aceh Province, these oral traditions function as cognitive maps that guide the relationship between human societies and their surrounding environments (Karim, 2025).

Among the diverse cultural expressions of the Acehean borderlands, the island of Simeulue preserves a unique and highly sophisticated oral tradition known as *Nandong* (Lestina et al., 2025). *Nandong* is a poetic, chanted performance accompanied by the rhythmic beats of the *gendang* (a traditional frame drum) and occasionally the violin (Lubis et al., 2024). Far from being merely a form of entertainment, *Nandong* represents a central socio-cultural institution for the Simeulue people, serving as a mandatory performance during significant life-cycle rituals, including weddings, circumcisions, and communal gatherings (Takari, 2020). Through these poetic chants, the *seniman tutur* (vocal artists) articulate the deep-seated values of the community, reflecting on human suffering, kinship obligations, and the historical migrations of their ancestors.

The conceptual core of many *Nandong* verses is deeply tied to the maritime landscape of Simeulue. Because the island is situated in the Indian Ocean, its geography has naturally shaped a unique maritime cosmology among its inhabitants (Sutton et al., 2021). Within this context, maritime metaphors, particularly those involving boats, waves, and navigation, are frequently used to explain complex social relations and existential human experiences (Brayshaw, 2024). The physical vessel, historically known as the *biduk* or *sampan*, is not simply treated as a tool for economic extraction or transport; rather, it is elevated to a powerful symbol of social structure, familial responsibility, and human agency in the face of natural adversity (Pinheiro-Machado et al., 2021). Consequently, the poetic verses of *Nandong* serve as a linguistic space where physical sea voyages are transformed into philosophical reflections on life's journeys.

Despite the cultural significance of *Nandong*, the rapid expansion of digital media, globalized communication networks, and changing socio-economic structures in the twenty-first century have placed this oral tradition in a precarious position (Kiarie, 2024). Modern technological shifts have created a generation gap, leading to a significant decline in the transmission of *Nandong* to younger cohorts in Simeulue (Rahman et al., 2024). As the older generation of skilled *seniman tutur* passes away, the highly specialized vocabulary, archaic idioms, and philosophical metaphors embedded within these chants risk disappearing entirely (Déléage, 2020). This threat of cultural erosion makes the empirical documentation and theoretical analysis of *Nandong* highly urgent for contemporary scholars of Southeast Asian heritage.

When examining the existing scholarship on *Nandong*, a distinct analytical gap becomes clear. Previous research has primarily focused on the historical development of the performance, its general anthropological role in social cohesion, or its relation to *smong*, the local oral history that successfully warned residents of impending tsunamis (Ramli et al., 2024; Fadinul, 2021). While these studies have successfully highlighted the sociopolitical value of *Nandong*, they have largely overlooked its micro-textual, semiotic, and cognitive dimensions. Specifically, the highly localized and complex sub-genre known as the *Syair Perahu* (Boat Poem) within the *Nandong* repertoire has remained virtually unexamined in international academic literature.

Furthermore, a clear distinction must be made between the Simeulue *Syair Perahu* and the famous, highly researched *Syair Perahu* written by the seventeenth-century Sufi mystic Hamzah Fansuri. Existing literary analyses have extensively documented Fansuri's work, which employs the metaphor of the boat as an eschatological allegory for the soul's journey through the afterlife, emphasizing Islamic theology, divine law, and metaphysical salvation (Arifa et al., 2023). Conversely, the *Syair Perahu* of the Simeulue *Nandong* tradition is fundamentally pragmatic, secular, and deeply grounded in the lived, everyday realities of local fishermen (Lestina et al., 2024). Rather than focusing solely on theological preparation for the afterlife, the

Simeulue poem serves as a cognitive and practical guide for navigating real-world marine environments, negotiating family dynamics, and ensuring physical survival during ocean voyages. By failing to analyze this localized, secular version of the boat metaphor, current scholarship misses a crucial understanding of how maritime communities translate physical ocean survival into complex systems of social meaning.

To address these empirical and theoretical gaps, this study offers a systematic semiotic analysis of the *Syair Perahu* within the *Nandong* oral tradition of Simeulue. To achieve this, we utilize the triadic semiotic model developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (Sari et al., 2022). Peirce's semiotic framework, which deconstructs signs into the three interconnected components of the Representamen (the sign vehicle), the Object (the referent), and the Interpretant (the cognitive effect or mental translation), provides a powerful mechanism for understanding how physical entities are assigned cultural meaning (Sari et al., 2022). By categorizing the linguistic elements of the *Syair Perahu* into icons, indices, and symbols, this study moves beyond simple translation to examine how the poem functions as a cognitive map and ethical guide for the Simeulue community.

The primary objective of this research is twofold: to document and translate the specific four-stanza text of the *Syair Perahu* within the *Nandong* performance, and to deconstruct the semiotic mechanisms through which its maritime metaphors construct meaning. Through this approach, the study addresses several key questions: How do the physical materials of the boat (such as *kayu kapo-kapo*) and the natural elements (such as *angin sumadin*) operate as semiotic signs? In what ways does the text negotiate the boundaries between physical maritime labor and spiritual invocation? How does the poem mentally prepare young, inexperienced fishermen (*nahkoda baru*) for the economic and existential realities of the open sea?

This study contributes to the broader academic literature in three distinct ways. Theoretically, it expands the application of Peircean semiotics to indigenous oral traditions in Southeast Asia, demonstrating how abstract semiotic triads can explain the practical, everyday cognitive tools used by maritime societies. Methodologically, it preserves highly endangered linguistic data from the Devayan and local Malay dialects of Simeulue, capturing the authentic voices of three respected elder practitioners (*seniman tutur*) through rigorous qualitative fieldwork. Practically, the findings of this research provide valuable resources for cultural institutions, local governments, and heritage preservation bodies (such as the *Majelis Adat Aceh*) to develop targeted programs for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of outer-island communities. Ultimately, this paper argues that the *Syair Perahu* is not merely an aesthetic relic of the past, but an active, sophisticated system of maritime resilience, ecological wisdom, and cultural survival.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design grounded in interpretive ethnolinguistic and semiotic frameworks. A qualitative paradigm is particularly suited for this inquiry because it allows researchers to study social phenomena in their natural settings (Ahmad et al., 2019) focusing on the subjective meanings and cultural values that local actors attribute to their lived experiences. Rather than seeking statistical generalizations, this design aims to achieve an in-depth, contextual understanding of the oral traditions of the Simeulue community.

To deconstruct the linguistic layers of the oral poetry, this research is theoretically guided by the triadic semiotic model of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's framework provides a rigorous systematic basis for analyzing how linguistic signs construct meaning through a triadic relation. This triad comprises the Representamen (the physical signifier), the Object (the physical or conceptual referent), and the Interpretant (the mental effect, translation, or cognitive understanding generated by the sign). By using this design, the study goes beyond a simple literal translation of the *Syair Perahu* to uncover the underlying socio-ecological survival strategies, community navigation patterns, and cultural models of resilience embedded within the *Nandong* tradition.

## Data Source

The primary data for this study consist of the spoken and performed verses of the *Syair Perahu* within the *Nandong* oral tradition. These oral texts were recorded, transcribed, and translated from the local Devayan language and local Malay dialects spoken in Simeulue.

The primary human data sources are three expert informants selected through a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling was essential to identify key cultural actors who possess specialized, authoritative knowledge of the archaic maritime terminology and historical contexts of *Nandong*. The primary informants include:

- Informant 1: Ir. Iksan Musri (58 years old), a senior cultural officer serving at the Simeulue Customary Council (*Majelis Adat Simeulue*). He provided extensive contextual data regarding the historical integration of *Nandong* into regional customs, rites of passage, and municipal cultural policies.
- Informant 2: Suherman (60 years old), an active *Nandong* master and performer from Suka Jaya, who specializes in the vocalization of maritime chants and traditional drumming. He contributed detailed practical explanations of performance dynamics and maritime symbolism.
- Informant 3: Sukirman (66 years old), a veteran *seniman tutur* (oral artist) residing in Amiria Bahagia. He is widely recognized for his master-level command of ancestral maritime oral literature and provided the complete oral transcription of the four-stanza *Syair Perahu*.

Secondary data sources were gathered to triangulate and contextualize the field findings. These secondary materials include peer-reviewed journals, regional ethnographic archives, local historical registries, and relevant documents from cultural institutions, including the Tsunami Museum, Balai Bahasa, and Majelis Adat Aceh.

## Data Collection and Instruments

In qualitative research of this nature, the researchers serve as the primary instrument of data collection. Unlike quantitative designs that rely on inanimate measurement tools, a human instrument is highly adaptive, capable of reading non-verbal cues, interpreting emotional nuances during oral performances, and probing deep into esoteric idioms during interviews.

To support this primary human instrument, several auxiliary data collection instruments were developed and utilized:

- Semi-Structured Interview Guide: A set of open-ended questions designed to elicit information about the literal meanings of the poem, its performance contexts, the historical origin of specific terms (e.g., *ransung salodang* and *angin sumadin*), and the moral teachings conveyed to novice seafarers.
- Observation Protocol Checklist: A structured sheet used during field observations to record the physical settings of performances, the social interaction of the audience, the use of traditional musical instruments (such as the *gendang* and violin), and the physical gestures of the *seniman tutur*.
- Digital Recording Equipment: High-definition audio and video recorders were used to capture the exact phonetic pronunciations, musical pitches, and rhythmic variations of the *Syair Perahu* performances.
- Field Notebooks: Used to write immediate, detailed reflective notes, environmental descriptions, and situational observations that could not be captured by audio recording alone.

## Procedures

The data collection process was carried out systematically over several sequential phases to ensure ethical compliance, cultural sensitivity, and data accuracy: Phase 1: Rapport Building; Phase 2: Observation; Phase 3: Interviews; Phase 4: Transcription & Verification.

### Phase 1: Rapport Building and Ethical Clearance

Before initiating fieldwork, the research team secured formal administrative permissions from regional authorities and local customary leaders in Simeulue. Upon entering the field, the researchers spent time establishing rapport with the community and the *seniman tutur*. This



initial integration was critical to build mutual trust and ensure that the informants felt comfortable sharing sensitive, ancestral oral knowledge.

#### Phase 2: Participant Observation

The researchers conducted direct observations of *Nandong* performances in their natural community settings, particularly during weddings, family celebrations, and coastal gatherings in East Simeulue. These observations allowed the team to document the sociocultural atmosphere, the physical interaction between the penandong (performers) and the community, and the precise moment of musical and poetic delivery.

#### Phase 3: In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the observations, the researchers conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews with the three primary informants. The interviews were held in comfortable, non-threatening locations chosen by the informants, such as their homes or local community centers. Rather than sticking strictly to a rigid questionnaire, the researchers used a conversational approach, allowing the informants to narrate the history, meaning, and socio-ecological background of each stanza of the *Syair Perahu* in their own words.

#### Phase 4: Transcription and Member-Checking

The audio-recorded performances and interviews were compiled and carefully transcribed. Because the *Syair Perahu* contains archaic Devayan vocabulary and localized Malay idioms, the transcriptions were translated first into standard Indonesian and then into academic English. To ensure linguistic and conceptual accuracy, a member-checking procedure was conducted. The translated transcripts were brought back to the primary informants, who verified that the written text and translated meanings accurately represented their oral testimonies and cultural intents.

### Semiotic Mapping and Operationalization

In qualitative and semiotic research, "measurement" is operationalized through the rigorous categorization, classification, and validation of qualitative variables, rather than statistical metrics.

To systematically analyze the linguistic signs within the *Syair Perahu*, the research team operationalized Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model. Signs were identified within the transcribed stanzas and mapped according to their semiotic relationships:

1. Iconic Identification: Assessing elements based on physical or topological likeness (e.g., how the physical shape of *ransung saladang* resembles a traditional canoe).
2. Indexical Identification: Mapping causal, existential, or spatial linkages between signs (e.g., how the presence of *angin sumadin* or rocky reefs points to the physical hazards of the Indian Ocean).
3. Symbolic Identification: Deciphering signs whose meanings are established through social convention, cultural habits, or shared historical narratives (e.g., how the *biduk* serves as an emblem of familial duty, social status, and migration).

### Ensuring Trustworthiness

To satisfy the rigorous standards of top-tier Scopus-indexed journals, the validity and reliability of the qualitative data were established using several criteria:

- Credibility (Internal Validity): Achieved through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, and the triangulation of data sources. The researchers compared the oral testimonies of active performers with written historical archives and the assessments of local customary authorities.
- Transferability (External Validity): Addressed by providing a thick description of the geographic, cultural, and socio-historical context of Simeulue, allowing future researchers to apply similar semiotic approaches to other maritime oral traditions in Southeast Asia.
- Dependability (Reliability): Maintained through an inquiry audit, where a detailed, step-by-step audit trail of raw records, field notes, and analytical decisions was kept and reviewed for consistency.
- Confirmability (Objectivity): Ensured by conducting member-checking with the primary oral artists and practicing reflexivity to minimize researcher bias during the translation and interpretive phases.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative and semiotic data were analyzed using an interactive thematic-semiotic model. This process integrated the qualitative data analysis steps of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña with Peircean semiotic deconstruction.

The data analysis technique followed four distinct, concurrent activities: 1. Data Condensation: The voluminous raw transcripts from interviews and field notes were systematically organized and focused. The researchers discarded irrelevant conversational digressions and isolated the key linguistic units of the four stanzas of the *Syair Perahu*. These key units were coded according to their literal terminology, ecological references, and performative context. 2. Semiotic Triadic Classification: The condensed poetic codes were subjected to Peircean semiotic analysis. Each linguistic sign identified in the stanzas was separated into its Representamen (the spoken phrase), its Object (the material or situational referent), and its Interpretant (the cultural and cognitive meaning). The signs were then categorized into the three relational classes of icon, index, and symbol to determine how the poem conveys its practical, ethical, and spiritual warnings. 3. Data Display: The analyzed semiotic signs were organized into structured matrices, descriptive tables, and analytical narratives. This systematic display made the complex relationships between the physical tools of navigation and their deeper cultural interpretations easy to observe, helping to reveal patterns across the four stanzas of the poem. 4. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: In the final phase, the researchers interpreted the displayed data to draw meaningful conclusions about the cognitive role of the *Syair Perahu*. These conclusions were verified by checking them against the broader ethnographic literature on Austronesian maritime cultures and by seeking final qualitative validation from regional cultural experts. This dual-verification loop ensured that the academic conclusions remained highly accurate, valid, and faithful to the living cultural realities of the Simeulue community.

## Findings

The analysis of the *Syair Perahu* within the *Nandong* oral tradition of Simeulue reveals a highly structured, multidimensional linguistic network. Through the application of Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic framework, the text of the poem is shown to function as a cognitive and practical guide for maritime navigation and socio-ecological survival. The findings are organized below into three central thematic categories: the material and structural representation of the vessel, the environmental and ecological dynamics of navigation, and the socio-ethical and spiritual frameworks of seafaring (Figure 1 and Table 1).

The following is the complete stanza of the "Syair Perahu" (Boat Poem) within the "Nandong" tradition, as obtained by the researcher from the informant's oral account:

*Biduk madin nangkodo radin  
Kayu sampannyo kapo kapo  
Lauik api anginnyo sumadin  
Manyaru tuo ibu bapo*

*Biduk ketek ransung salodang Niat manjalang kualo baru  
Tido bulih adiak manumpang  
Biduak ketek nahkoda baru*

*Manggala mudik manggolong  
Manggala diate batu  
Insya Allah nabi manolong  
Karang tabukak biduk lalu*

*Ikan banamo samen-samen  
Baok sisiknyo kaparahu  
Lauik sailan di pasamen  
Taluknyo bahun kami tau*

### Material and Structural Representation of the Vessel

The first theme centers on how the physical components of the traditional watercraft are represented as semiotic signs that convey structural limitations, human agency, and spatial boundaries. In the first and second stanzas of the poem, the vessel is identified as *biduk* or *sampan*, constructed from localized botanical materials.

In the second line of the first stanza, the text specifies that the canoe is constructed from *kayu kapo-kapo* (*Kayu sampannyo kapo kapo*). From a semiotic perspective, *kayu kapo-kapo* serves as an icon representing a highly specific, durable timber species indigenous to the Simeulue tropical rainforests. The material referent is chosen because of its unique physical properties. During interviews, Informant 2 noted that *kayu kapo-kapo* is characterized by its lightweight density and exceptional resistance to marine wood-boring organisms and solar degradation.

By referencing this specific wood, the poem moves beyond artistic ornament; it establishes an indexical relationship between the selection of high-quality local materials and the structural integrity of the boat. The physical signifier (*kayu kapo-kapo*) functions as a safety guarantee. For the novice fisherman (*nahkoda baru*), the mention of this timber provides a cognitive assurance of seaworthiness, signaling that the vessel has been engineered to withstand the mechanical stresses of the open ocean.

In the second stanza, the physical shape of the boat is described as *ransung salodang* (*Biduk ketek ransung salodang*), which translates to the protective, boat-shaped sheath of a coconut blossom. The *ransung salodang* functions as an icon based on topological likeness. The physical structure of the coconut spadix is narrow, sleek, and tapered at both ends, directly mirroring the hydrodynamic architecture of the traditional Simeulue dugout canoe.

This iconic representation carries a critical indexical warning regarding the vessel's capacity and stability. Because a *salodang* is naturally narrow and shallow, the sign indexically points to low displacement and limited storage capacity. This structural reality is immediately linked to a social rule in the third and fourth lines of the stanza: *Tido bulih adiak manumpang / Biduk ketek nahkoda baru* (The younger sibling cannot climb aboard, for the boat is small and the captain is inexperienced). Here, the physical limits of the vessel, represented iconically by the coconut spadix, dictate a strict code of maritime safety. A small, unstable canoe operated by an unseasoned captain cannot safely support additional passengers.

### Environmental and Ecological Dynamics of Navigation

The second theme addresses how the natural elements, coastal geography, and marine fauna of Simeulue are encoded within the poem to prepare seafarers for environmental challenges. The third line of the first stanza introduces severe environmental hazards: *Lauik api anginnyo sumadin* (The sea is of fire, the wind is *sumadin*). The term *angin sumadin* refers to a localized, violent offshore wind shear that occurs during monsoon transitions, while *lauik api* (sea of fire) refers to the bioluminescent, highly turbulent waves associated with rough night seas.

Within Peirce's model, *angin sumadin* and *lauik api* function as indexical signs of extreme meteorological and oceanographic danger. They do not merely describe the weather; they point to real physical threats that can cause capsizing and loss of life. Culturally, these signs are translated into an imperative for parental and ancestral invocation, as expressed in the final line of the stanza: *Manyaru tuo ibu bapo* (To invoke the blessings of mother and father). The existential threat of the environment indexically triggers a turning inward toward familial protection, showing that physical survival at sea is deeply connected to maintaining social and spiritual bonds on land.

The third stanza illustrates the physical transition from the safety of the river estuary to the open sea:

*Manggala mudik manggolong*  
*Manggala diate batu*  
*Insya Allah nabi manolong*  
*Karang tabukak biduk lalu*

The verb *manggala* refers to the strenuous physical act of using a long wooden punting pole (*gala*) to steer and push a heavy boat through shallow, rock-filled waters. The *gala* acts as

an icon of manual labor and coastal navigation. The act of punting over rocks (*manggala diate batu*) indexically points to the shallow, reef-dominated coastal geomorphology of Simeulue.

This transition zone is highly dangerous because ocean swells break violently over shallow coral reefs. The poem indexically links human physical effort (*manggala*) with divine intervention (*Insya Allah nabi manolong*), suggesting that the physical opening of the reef (*karang tabukak*) and the safe passage of the boat (*biduk lalu*) can only occur when manual skill, caution, and spiritual devotion are combined.

### Socio-Ethical and Spiritual Frameworks of Seafaring

The final theme explores how the *Syair Perahu* uses maritime tasks to construct symbolic meanings of economic survival, social responsibility, and cultural identity. In the fourth stanza, the narrative shifts from navigation to economic success and the return journey: *Ikan banamo samen-samen / Baok sisiknyo kaparahu* (The fish is named *samen-samen*, bring its scales aboard the boat). The *samen-samen* fish represents a highly valued local pelagic species. Capturing this fish and bringing its scales into the boat serves as an index of a successful catch and economic productivity.

Symbolically, the *samen-samen* represents the rewards of hard work and self-sufficiency. In the maritime economy of Simeulue, bringing home fish is the primary way a fisherman fulfills his role as a provider for his family and community. The scales of the fish, glistening in the boat, are symbols of wealth, survival, and the validation of the young captain's skills.

The poem concludes with an introspective reflection on the journey home: *Lauik sailan di pasamen / Taluknyo balun kami tau* (The sea of Sailan shines like a mirror, yet its safe harbors we do not yet know). The phrase *lauik sailan di pasamen* describes a calm, glassy sea surface that reflects the sky like a mirror. This glassy sea functions as an icon of deceptive calmness. Indexically, a flat, calm sea can easily hide submerged coral heads or indicate an impending, sudden change in wind patterns.

The final line, *Taluknyo balun kami tau* (the safe harbor we do not yet know), represents the ultimate symbol of migration (*merantau*) and life's uncertainty. For the Simeulue community, leaving the island to seek fortune or going out to sea is a fundamental rite of passage. The "unknown harbor" symbolizes the inherent risks of venturing into unfamiliar physical and social spaces. By ending on this note, the poem instills a permanent attitude of vigilance, humility, and respect for the unknown, reminding the seafarer that successful navigation requires constant ecological awareness and cultural adaptability.

To synthesize these findings, the linguistic signs analyzed across the four stanzas are mapped into their Peircean triadic components below:

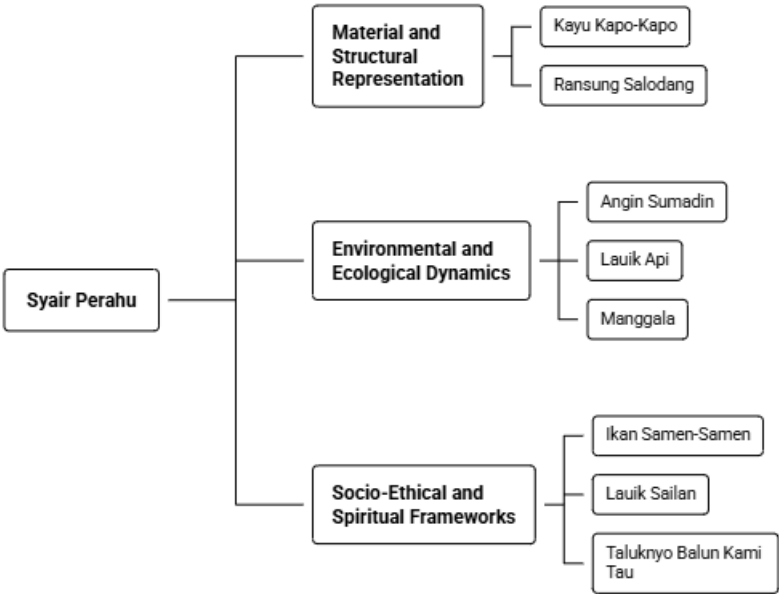
Table 1: Signs Analyzed Across the Four Stanzas and Semiotic Mappings

| Stanza   | Representamen<br>(Linguistic Sign) | Peircean Class | Object (Physical Referent) | Interpretant<br>(Cultural Meaning)                                       |
|----------|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stanza 1 | Kayu kapo-kapo                     | Indexical      | Durable local timber       | Structural integrity, safety, and mechanical reliability of the vessel.  |
| Stanza 2 | Ransung salodang                   | Iconic         | Narrow coconut sheath      | Hydrodynamic design, limited cargo capacity, and passenger restrictions. |
| Stanza 3 | Manggala diate batu                | Indexical      | Punting over shallow reefs | Human physical effort, caution, and the necessity of divine protection.  |



|          |                      |        |          |                           |                                                                                                |
|----------|----------------------|--------|----------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stanza 4 | Ikan<br>samen        | samen- | Symbolic | Valuable pelagic<br>catch | Economic self-<br>sufficiency,<br>social duty, and<br>successful<br>maritime labor.            |
| Stanza 4 | Taluknyo<br>kami tau | balun  | Symbolic | Uncharted<br>harbor       | The<br>vulnerability of<br>migration<br>(merantau) and<br>life's<br>unpredictable<br>journeys. |

Figure 1: A Multidimensional Linguistic Network



Discussion

Prior studies that have noted the importance of oral traditions as critical vessels for transmitting indigenous ecological knowledge and socio-ecological survival strategies have laid a strong foundation for maritime anthropology (Whaanga et al., 2018; Kitolelei et al., 2021). These investigations have historically illustrated how isolated coastal communities utilize localized linguistic structures and verbal arts to construct cognitive maps of their volatile environments (Aragón-Duran et al., 2020; Nurislamingsih et al., 2022). However, very little was found in the literature on the question of how micro-textual, localized versions of boat metaphors, specifically the pragmatic, secular *Syair Perahu* within the *Nandong* tradition of Simeulue, differ semiotically from established eschatological allegories such as the classic work of Hamzah Fansuri (Takari, 2020). By failing to deconstruct these localized maritime chants at their finest level of linguistic granularity, existing literature has missed how physical objects and natural elements are assigned practical, survival-based meanings in outer-island communities.

An initial objective of the project was to identify the exact semiotic mechanisms, using Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic model of signs, through which the *Syair Perahu* operates as an ecological and cognitive map for the Simeulue community. To achieve this deep analysis, the study did not rely on automated summaries or random samplings of text but instead examined the precise linguistic relationships within the four-stanza poem. The project sought to determine how physical signs such as localized timber (*kayu kapo-kapo*), hydrodynamic structures (*ransung salodang*), meteorological hazards (*angin sumadin*), manual labor (*manggala*), and

valuable catches (*ikan samen-samen*) are translated into cognitive guides for novice captains navigating the open waters of the Indian Ocean.

The results of this study show that the *Syair Perahu* is a highly structured cognitive and ethical manual that links physical maritime artifacts directly to structural limitations and safety guidelines. The deep analysis of the first and second stanzas reveals that the choice of construction materials and vessel shape is never merely decorative. Specifically, the mention of *kayu kapo-kapo* acts as an indexical signifier of durability and mechanical reliability. Furthermore, the iconic representation of the dugout canoe as a *ransung salodang* (coconut spadix) indexically establishes a strict capacity threshold. This physical reality is immediately translated into a socio-familial restriction, dictating that a novice captain (*nahkoda baru*) cannot safely transport passengers in such a narrow, low-displacement craft.

Another important finding is that natural phenomena and manual navigation techniques are encoded as indexical signs of danger that trigger protective social responses and spiritual invocation. When the text describes the sea as a "sea of fire" (*lauik api*) and the wind as *angin sumadin*, it refers to real physical risks that require immediate, practical caution. In the third stanza, the physical act of punting over shallow reefs (*manggala diate batu*) indexically maps the dangerous transition from the calm estuary to the open sea. The poem shows that navigating these hazards successfully requires a careful combination of manual skill, ecological vigilance, and spiritual invocation (*Insya Allah nabi manolong*).

One unexpected finding was the extent to which the *Syair Perahu* remains purely pragmatic and secular, focusing on local ecological survival and household economics, rather than theological preparation for the afterlife. In the fourth stanza, the instruction to bring the glistening scales of the *samen-samen* fish into the boat (*baok sisiknyo kaparahu*) serves as a powerful symbol of successful labor and economic productivity. This secular focus stands in contrast to classic maritime literature in the region, which often treats the ship as a spiritual vessel. It reveals that the Simeulue community has developed a highly specialized oral tradition focused on real-world maritime resilience and physical survival.

This finding is consistent with that of Aswani et al. (2020) who argued that small island societies construct highly sophisticated, localized terminologies to navigate the physical and economic challenges of their immediate marine ecosystems. The results also corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work by Álvarez et al. (2023), which demonstrated that the oral traditions of Simeulue function as active systems of ecological wisdom and environmental adaptation. By demonstrating how the *Syair Perahu* utilizes localized signs to guide behavior, this study supports evidence from previous observations showing that indigenous groups in island Southeast Asia rely heavily on oral literature to preserve practical navigational safety rules (Nopriyasma et al, 2024).

However, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research on Indonesian maritime poetry that has tended to generalize all "boat poems" under the theological and allegorical framework of Hamzah Fansuri's *Syair Perahu* (Ramlan, 2025). While Fansuri's seventeenth-century work uses the boat as an eschatological metaphor for the soul's journey toward divine salvation, the Simeulue *Syair Perahu* differs sharply by prioritizing physical survival, real-world navigation, and practical family safety. The present study has shown that the Simeulue tradition is grounded in the lived, everyday realities of the Indian Ocean, illustrating that maritime metaphors in Austronesian cultures can be highly secular, adaptive, and practical.

A possible explanation for this might be the geographic isolation of Simeulue and its exposure to extreme natural hazards, such as tsunamis and severe ocean storms. Because of these persistent environmental challenges, the island's oral traditions have naturally evolved to prioritize physical safety, material durability, and ecological literacy. Another possible explanation for this is that the *Syair Perahu* serves as a practical training tool for young fishermen before they embark on dangerous economic journeys. In an isolated island community where marine resources are vital for survival, the oral transmission of real-world seafaring wisdom is a necessary strategy for keeping the community safe and self-sufficient.

These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution. These findings may be somewhat limited by the small, highly specialized sample of oral artists (*seniman tutur*) who are still active in Simeulue. Because *Nandong* is an endangered tradition facing a decline in

transmission among younger generations, the interpretations provided by our expert informants reflect a deeply specialized, ancestral knowledge that may not be widely understood by the broader, younger population of the island. Therefore, while these findings provide a reliable semiotic map of the traditional *Syair Perahu*, they cannot be generalized as a reflection of modern, everyday language use among all contemporary Simeulue youth.

These findings suggest that the *Syair Perahu* within the *Nandong* tradition is not merely an aesthetic performance, but an active, highly organized cognitive system that preserves centuries of practical ecological science. The findings reported here suggest that maritime metaphors are used by coastal communities to convert physical dangers into memorable social rules. According to these data, we can infer that the linguistic structures of the poem function as an educational curriculum, helping young, inexperienced captains internalize safety rules, material limits, and ecological signs before they ever face the physical dangers of the open sea.

The present results are significant in at least two major respects. First, they provide a systematic, micro-level application of Peircean semiotics to an endangered Southeast Asian oral tradition, showing how physical and natural signs are translated into socio-ecological behavior. Second, this research documents and preserves a unique, secular version of the *Syair Perahu* in the Devayan language and local Malay dialects, capturing a crucial element of coastal cultural heritage before it is lost to globalization and rapid technological change. These findings are reassuring since they prove that indigenous oral traditions possess a high degree of intellectual and practical sophistication, serving as valuable resources for local cultural preservation.

Further studies, which take these variables into account, will need to be undertaken. To develop a full picture of the *Nandong* tradition, additional studies will be needed that focus on other thematic sub-genres within the repertoire, such as those detailing agricultural cycles, historical migrations, and medicinal practices. Future studies on the current topic are therefore recommended to explore how local cultural bodies, such as the *Majelis Adat Aceh*, can integrate these oral survival guides into modern maritime safety education and regional heritage preservation programs. This is an important issue for future research to ensure that the rich ecological wisdom of Simeulue's ancestors continues to guide future generations of seafarers.

## Conclusion

This study has provided a systematic semiotic analysis of the *Syair Perahu* within the *Nandong* oral tradition of Simeulue, utilizing Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of signs to unpack how this coastal community encodes ecological survival and maritime navigation. By examining the transcribed verses of this poem at a fine level of linguistic granularity, the research demonstrates that the *Syair Perahu* functions as a sophisticated cognitive and practical guide for seafarers. Rather than operating purely as aesthetic folklore or as an eschatological allegory for the soul's journey, the Simeulue *Syair Perahu* remains uniquely grounded in the pragmatic realities of physical materials, local oceanography, household economics, and family safety.

The key findings of this investigation reveal that every linguistic element within the four-stanza poem is assigned a clear semiotic purpose. The choice of local timber (*kayu kapo-kapo*) serves as an indexical signifier of physical durability, while the narrow shape of the dugout canoe (*ransung saladang*) establishes a strict safety limit on boat capacity, warning inexperienced captains against carrying additional passengers. Furthermore, localized meteorological hazards, such as the violent *angin sumadin* and turbulent *lauik api*, act as indexical warnings of danger that require immediate human caution, structural awareness, and spiritual invocation. Finally, the capture of the valuable *samen-samen* fish symbolizes economic self-sufficiency and the successful fulfillment of domestic and communal duties. Together, these signs form a highly organized educational curriculum that prepares novice fishermen for the physical and social realities of the Indian Ocean.

The implications of these findings are highly significant for both maritime anthropology and cultural heritage preservation. Theoretically, this study demonstrates the value of applying Peircean semiotics to indigenous oral literatures, illustrating how abstract sign triads can explain the practical, real-world survival tools developed by coastal communities. Methodologically, by documenting and translating these verses from the endangered Devayan language and local Malay dialects, this research preserves invaluable linguistic and cultural assets before they are

lost to rapid globalization. Practically, these results highlight the urgent need for regional cultural institutions, such as the *Majelis Adat Aceh*, to integrate ancestral maritime oral traditions into modern maritime safety education and regional preservation policies.

Ultimately, the *Syair Perahu* of Simeulue is far more than an artistic relic of a bygone era; it is a living testament to human resilience, ecological intelligence, and adaptability. As coastal communities face modern environmental crises and rapid technological shifts, preserving the sophisticated ancestral wisdom embedded within traditions like *Nandong* becomes increasingly vital. By listening to the voices of the *seniman tutur* and understanding the deep meanings of their songs, we gain crucial insights into how humanity can navigate the unpredictable seas of the future while remaining deeply anchored to its cultural roots.

### Ethics approval

The study was conducted in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

### Competing interests

All the authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

### Funding

This study received no external funding.

### Underlying data

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

### Declaration of artificial intelligence use

Artificial intelligence tools (GPT and Grammarly) were employed in this study strictly for language editing purposes, specifically to improve sentence structure, grammar, and manuscript readability. All conceptual synthesis, empirical interpretations, and final editorial decisions were conducted entirely by the author(s).

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