

## **Variety Of *Bhenga* And *Manu* Ornaments At The Sa'o Traditional House Of Gurusina Traditional Village**

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East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) has a rich culture and diverse traditions. Several ethnic sub-groups, including the Ngada-Lio ethnic sub-group, mark this diversity. This ethnic sub-group inhabits the Ngada Regency area, where traditional villages are scattered at several points. Traditional villages are places to preserve a culture that has been passed down from generation to generation, one of which is *weti carvings*. These carvings have a variety of figures, including *Bhénga* and *Manu*. The depiction of these two figures is like a buffalo horn and a chicken. In some traditional houses in Indonesia, there are also similar figures, namely in the Tongkonan Toraja traditional house and the Karo Batak traditional house. This research is a qualitative descriptive research. The researcher chose this method to describe the figures of *Bhénga* and *Manu* in detail and depth. This research began with observation and interviews, after which the research continued by analyzing the data using morphological, stylistic, and comparative analysis. The results of this study show that various ornamental figures of buffalo and chicken are depicted on the walls of the Sao traditional house because the two animals have a special closeness to the community. Besides that, the ornamental variety is carved on the wall of the traditional house as an addition to the aesthetic value of the traditional house.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Traditional House, Gurusina, Carving*

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## INTRODUCTION

East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) is one of the provinces in Indonesia, consisting of approximately 111 islands, one of which is the island of Flores. The island, with an area of 13,540 km<sup>2</sup>, has a heterogeneous population characterized by the cultural diversity owned by its people. From the perspective of language and culture, there are five ethnic sub-groups, namely Manggarai-Riung, Ngada-Lio (consisting of Ranga, Maung, Ngadha, Nage, Keo, Palue), Mukang, Lamaholot, and Kedang (Taum, 2014: 3). Each of these ethnic sub-groups has its language and culture that is different from the others, the traditional houses between the sub-groups also have their differences and uniqueness. The Ngadha-lio ethnic group inhabits most of the Ngada Regency area today, and this ethnicity has a rich culture, manifested by the existence of many traditional villages in the Ngada Regency area. There are 21 traditional villages spread across the Ngadha Regency area, including the Gurusina traditional village. The people of Flores do not have a tradition of writing but speak so that the traditional villages that remain to this day help preserve and maintain the authenticity of the culture passed down from generation to generation by their ancestors.

Gurusina, as a traditional village, participates in preserving the existing culture; this traditional village is still preserved in its authenticity, manifested by the existence of megalithic stones, Sa'o traditional houses, and the community that still adheres to tradition. This village is located at the foot of Mount Inerie and is administered by Watumanu Village, Jerebuu District, and Ngada Regency. The Gurusina traditional village has a unique settlement arrangement, seen in its traditional houses that face each other. In the middle are open spaces and megalithic stones sacred by the Gurusina community. Besides that, there are also *Bhaga* and *Ngadhu* buildings that are decorated. This village is inhabited by three small tribes, the *Kabi*, *Agokae*, and *Agoazi* tribes. The existence of these three tribes is marked by the establishment of three *Bhaga* and *Ngadhu* in the middle of the village. The Gurusina community has a traditional house made of bamboo and reeds called Sa'o, which is reflected in the rich traditions and culture of the community. This traditional house is also a medium of expressing art for the community, and it is marked by the presence of *weti*, which is a mandatory element of the Sa'o traditional house. *Weti* is a carving that always decorates the Sa'o traditional house. Its distinctive and meaningful motif makes the traditional aesthetic aura appear in this traditional house.

*Weti* is carved on the wall of the traditional Sa'o house, and various figures are depicted. These figures are also full of meaning and history, which the Gurusina people believe. This belief is inherited from generation to generation by their ancestors. *Bhénga* and *Manu* are two of the figures from *Weti*, and both figures are found in all Sa'o houses in the Gurusina traditional village. Both are depicted in large sizes and placed in the middle so that if you look at them, the two figures dominate more than carvings with other figures. *Bhénga* has a shape that resembles a buffalo horn that is curved and black, while *Manu* is in the shape of a chicken that is given red and white colors. In addition to the Sa'o traditional house in the Gurusina traditional village, artistic expression in the traditional house is also found in the Tongkonan traditional house from Toraja and the Batak Karo traditional house, which has carvings and various ornaments that decorate the traditional house, these carvings and ornamental varieties contain aesthetic meaning and function for their owners. Figures in the form of buffalo horns and chickens are also found in the carvings and ornaments of the traditional house. This figure is carved on the front wall of the Tongkonan traditional house (Roosandriantini, 2018: 27), and the ornamental variety decorates the roof of the Batak Karo traditional house. The main problem raised by this study is why the Gurusina people chose to carve *Bhénga* and *Manu* figures in their traditional houses. This article will explain the relationship between the figures of *Bhénga* and *Manu* carved in the *weti* of the Sa'o traditional house and the life of the Gurusina people.

## RESEARCH AND METHODELOGY

This paper results from qualitative descriptive research conducted in the Gurusina traditional village, Watumanu District, Ngada Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. It is necessary to use qualitative research to investigate the phenomenon of depicting *Bhénga* and *Manu* figures in *weti* in Sa'o traditional houses. Qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words from humans as the object of study and observable behaviors. The approach is directed at the context and individuals holistically (Abdussamad, 2021: 23). The researcher chose this method to describe the figures of *Bhénga* and *Manu* in detail and depth, as well as the behavior of the Gurusina people. Observation, interviews, and documentation can carry out data collection techniques in qualitative research, all of which will be used as primary data (Hartanto, 2023: 273).

This research began with data collection by observing weti in the Sa'o traditional house of the Gurusina traditional village, namely by directly observing the shape of the *Bhénga* and *Manu* figures carved in the traditional house. Furthermore, data was collected using the interview method, namely interviewing Mr. Letus Mou and Mr. Polus Suri, an elderly traditional leader in the Gurusina traditional village.

After collecting data through observation and interviews, the research continued by analyzing the data using a morphological analysis. The term morphology initially originated from the branch of linguistics that studies the word structure of a language (Trask, 2007: 178; Crystal, 2008: 314). The definition of morphology in linguistics studies the structure of words and then adapts them into an analysis method. The morphological analysis method is carried out by observing and analyzing the shape of an object of study. In this study, morphological analysis was carried out by observing and analyzing the shape of *Bhénga* and *Manu* in the Sa'o traditional house of the Gurusina traditional village. Stylistic analysis is the second analysis used in this study. Stylistic analysis is an analysis method used in identifying objects through colors, decorative varieties, and decorative decorations (Sukendar, 1999: 41). This analysis was used to analyze the variety of ornaments, colors, and forms of decorative decorations found in the carvings of *Bhénga* and *Manu* figures. Comparative analysis is also used in this study, which compares objects at the research location with similar research locations and objects outside the research area (Haribuana, 2014: 138). In this study, the comparison object is the Toraja traditional house in the province of South Sulawesi and the Batak Karo traditional house in North Sumatra. This is because there are also similar ornamental varieties in the form of buffalo horns and chickens that decorate the traditional house. Comparative analysis is used to compare, which can later conclude the existence of *Bhénga* and *Manu* figures in the Sa'o traditional house.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Sa'o Traditional House

Traditional houses are used to gather, shelter, and engage in activities. For the Gurusina community, traditional houses are essential aspects of the descendants and identity of a group. The Gurusina community inherited their traditional house from girls, and this is due to the application of the matrilineal system in their lives. The girl will take care of the house like a human being takes care of her child. The Gurusina people consider the sa'o

house like a human being. They name the house, give it a gender, and care for it like a human.



**Figure 1.** Sa'o traditional house

(Source: Personal Documentation, 2023)

There are two leading houses for each tribe in the Gurusina traditional village: *Sa'o saka pu'u* and *Sa'o saka lobo*. *Sa'o saka pu'u* is characterized by a crown or *anaie* on the house's roof. The crown is shaped like a miniature of a sa'o traditional house. *Sa'o saka pu'u* is related to *bhaga*, a building similar to a sa'o traditional house but located in the central part of the village, where the spirits of female ancestors reside. *Sa'o saka lobo* is characterized by *ata* or male dolls on the house's roof. *Sa'o saka lobo* is related to *ngadhu*, which is in the middle of the village. *Ngadhu* is shaped like an umbrella and carved with a face. *Ngadhu* symbolizes the male ancestors of a clan that inhabits the village (Susetyarto, 2013: 28).



**Figure 2.** Right *Ngadhu* and Left *Bhaga*

(Source: Personal documentation, 2023)

Sa'o traditional houses are divided into several levels with their names and functions. These levels lead to vertical levels. Namely, the top part is the most sacred. These levels include *Tangi*, *Paliwa'i*, *Padha*, *Teda one*, *one*, and *kae/iru*. On the first level is *Tangi*, an arrangement of stones as the first stepping before entering the interior of Sa'o. A hole-in-the-stone arrangement symbolizes the host opening the door wide for guests who will visit. The second level is *Paliwa'i*, an arrangement of stones that are higher and longer than *tangi*, and the arrangement of *Paliwa'i* stones as a place to stand to enter the next level. *Padha* is the third level of the traditional Sa'o house. This level is the outer foyer used to entertain guests and chat and is a public space in the Sa'o traditional house. In level four, *teda one* is a part of the inner foyer used for semi-public areas for guests and meeting places. Next is the fifth level, namely *one*, this level is a private room that no one except the members of the sa'o family can enter. *One* is also a sacred room for ceremonies and ritual activities. Finally, on the sixth level, above room *one*, there are *kae* and *iru*, which are used as storage places for wood and foodstuffs (Simatupang, 2016: 35).

In addition to these levels, several essential parts are found in the Sa'o traditional house, including *weti* found on the walls of the *padha* room and *teda one*. This part is in the form of carvings with various figures. Furthermore, *Kata bawa* is a connecting ladder between *teda one* and *one*. Above the word bring is an entrance to room *one* called *pene*. This door is a door that is opened by sliding, and the dimensions of the door are not large, so everyone who enters must bow down. Inside the *one* room, there is a *lapu lika*, which is three stones for the fireplace, and the fireplace is used for cooking in ceremonies or ritual activities carried out in *the one*. In the fireplace, a *ngadhu ka'e* pole support the room above it. Furthermore, there is a *mataraga*, which is a place to store heirlooms that have been inherited from generation to generation. The heirloom has different shapes in each Sa'o traditional house. Some are in the form of spears, and some are in the shape of a trident.

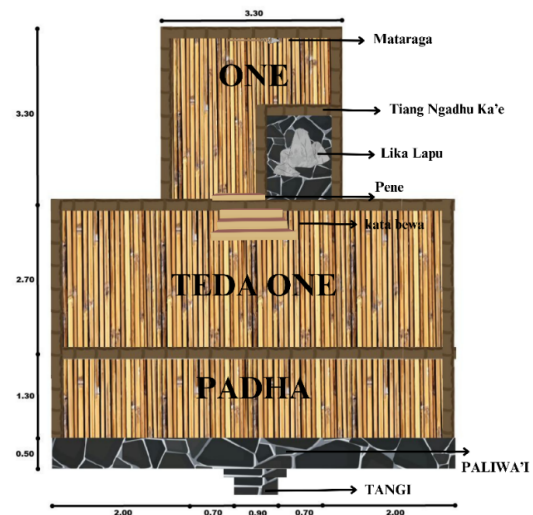


Figure 3 Tiered design in Sa'o traditional house

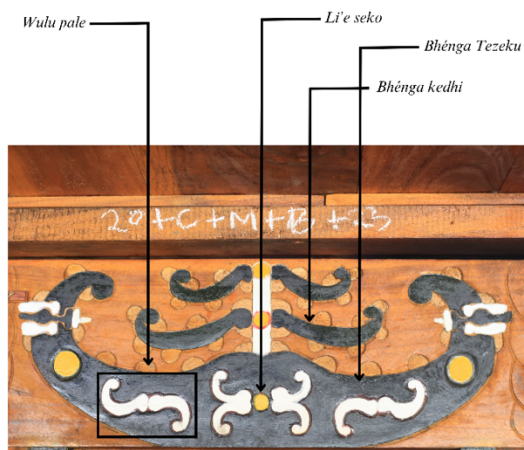
(Source: Personal documentation, 2023)

Sa'o traditional houses have distinctive elements, including buildings built with stilt house construction, the roof using reeds, construction without nails, and unique carvings that decorate the house's walls with various figures and other decorative carvings. The community, named the carving *weti*, has a variety of distinctive figures and striking colors to create an aesthetic feel in the Sa'o traditional house. *Weti* is not an ordinary carving that decorates the interior. It is a carving with the meaning and history that ancestors inherited. *Weti* can only be carved by *five pade*, namely a male carver who comes from a certain sa'o whose skills are passed down by the family line, which can be from fathers, uncles, and grandfathers. The use of these *five pades* has never changed from the past. For example, sa'o A will always use the services of *five pades* from sa'o B and will be passed on to his descendants (Simatupang, 2016: 35). *Weti* has a variety of ornamental forms and has its meaning and function. Among the various ornaments, two exciting figures, *Bhénga* and *Manu*, are found in 34 traditional houses in the Gurusina village.

### ***Bhénga and Manu***

The figure of *Bhénga* is found on the wall of the *one* room, and the carving of *Bhénga* is located right above the entrance. *Bhénga* is generally described as having three levels, but in some Sa'o houses, there is also a *bhénga* with only two levels, the lowest level having a larger size than the two levels above. *Bhénga* has a crescent-shaped shape with curved ends. The carving of the *bhénga* figure in the Sa'o traditional house has several ornamental varieties that decorate the carving, including *wulu pale*,

which is a buffalo horn that is depicted as having opposite directions, and *Li'e seko*, which is a variety of round, golden ornaments, this variety of ornaments decorate the inside of the *bhénga* (Polus, 2023). *Bhénga* decorates the interior of a traditional sa'o house not only as an aesthetic decoration but also as a meaning contained in its depiction. The Gurusina community believes that the figure of *bhénga* is a symbol of majesty and goodness. This carving is located above the door of *room one* and is more dominating than other figure carvings so that the symbol of majesty and goodness seems to be witnessed by everyone who visits the house. The elders in the Gurusina traditional village also believe that the *bhénga* carving resembles a boat, which is believed to be a means of transportation used by their ancestors to come to the Flores region (Mou, 2023). In addition to the variety of ornaments that decorate the carving, it also has a meaning, namely *wulu pale*, which means that every speech that has been issued is not allowed to disagree with the speech that has been said before.

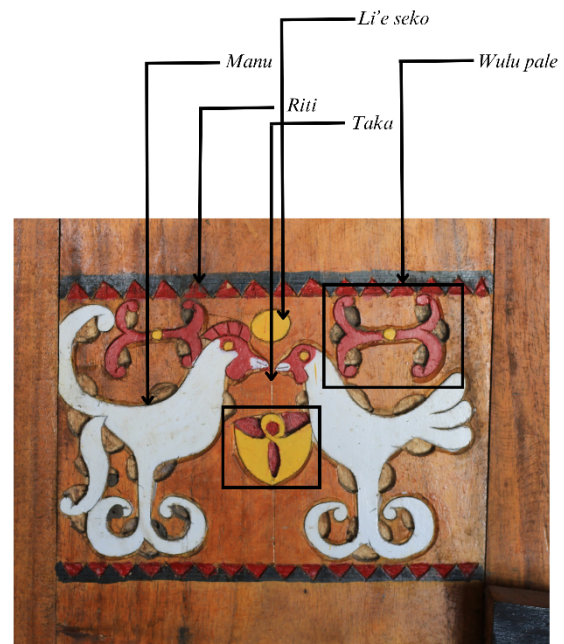


**Figure 4.** *Bhénga* at a sa'o traditional house

(source: Personal documentation, 2023)

This *manu* or carved chicken is located on the right and left of the entrance to *room one* or also carved on the upper right and left parts of the *weti*. The *manu* figure in the sa'o traditional house is shaped like a chicken. *Manu* is depicted as a pair of male and female chickens facing each other, with red and white colors. Moreover, the depiction is always equipped with *taka* (necklace) carvings, *wulu pale*, *Li'e seko*, and *riti* as image separators. *Manu* is depicted with a chicken figure because chickens are animals that are practical time guides for the ancestors of the Gurusina community in the past (Mou, 2023). Chicken is also a ritual medium, often carried out by the Gurusina community. In addition to the various ornamental menus that also decorate the carving, it also has meanings, including *taka*,

which is pendant jewelry, a necklace usually worn by men that symbolizes life expectancy and welfare.



**Gambar 5.** *manu* at sa'o traditional house

(sumber: Personal documentation, 2023)

Based on their nature, ornamental varieties can be grouped into two types, namely naturalistic and stylistic ornamental varieties. Various naturalistic ornaments are formed to imitate various natural events around them, so their visualization produces shapes that can be seen in nature. Meanwhile, stylistic ornamental varieties are formed based on the basic shape referred to. The style or stylization is changed by adhering to the basic shape (Budiwiyanto, 2007: 75). Based on this grouping, *bhénga* is included in a variety of stylistic ornaments, this is because the depiction of *bhénga*, which resembles a crescent moon with both curved ends is a stylized form of buffalo horns arranged upwards like the depiction of carvings on *bhénga*. While the ornamental variety of *manu* or chicken is included in the naturalistic nature, the depiction of *manu* visualizes the shape of the chicken around the Gurusina traditional village.

### Ornamental Varieties of Buffalo and Chicken at Toraja and Batak Karo Traditional Houses

The variety of ornaments that decorate traditional houses is not only in the Sa'o traditional house of the Gurusina traditional village but there are also several in other traditional houses, including the Tongkonan traditional house of the Toraja tribe and the Batak Karo traditional house, both traditional houses have a variety of distinctive ornaments that add aesthetic value to the house. The variety of ornaments in the

Toraja traditional house, in the form of carvings called *pasture*, has several depictions, distinctive coloring, and meanings in each figure. There is a carving motif whose depiction resembles a buffalo; the *Pa'tedong* motif depicts a buffalo's face equipped with eyes and horns. This motif means the hope of getting buffalo livestock because buffalo animals are a noble property for the Toraja tribe. In addition, there is also a *Pa'tedong tumuru* motif. This motif is described as resembling a buffalo sleeping in water. This motif means the hope of having a large number of buffalo livestock in the life of the Toraja people (Ismanto, 2020: 27). Buffalo is quite an important animal for the Toraja people; they believe that the buffalo symbolizes welfare; the buffalo also plays a vital role in the *Rambu Solo* ceremony, which is carried out to honor and deliver the spirit to the spirit realm or also referred to as the realm where the ancestors live. In this ceremony, the Toraja people sacrifice buffaloes as animals that are believed to deliver the spirits of the deceased to heaven (David, 2022: 85).



**Figure 6.** *Pa 'tedong* motif (right) and *Pa'tedong tumuru* (left)

(Source: DJKI Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia)

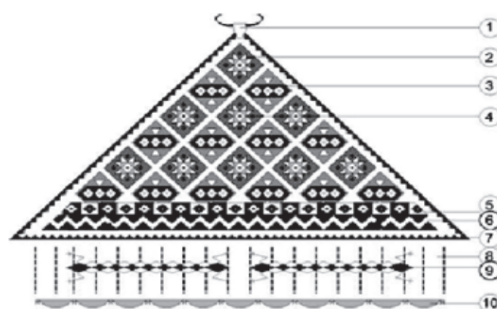
In addition to the carved figures of *Pa'tedong* and *Pa'tedong tumuru*, there is also the *Pa'manuk Londong* carving motif which is a motif found in the *Tongkonan Layuk* traditional house, this traditional house is made specifically for the leaders of the Toraja tribe, usually inhabited by a *Puang*. The depiction of the *Pa'manuk Londong* motif is in the form of two roosters standing on a circle like a wheel. The two chickens face each other. The Toraja people interpret chickens as showing time for the Toraja people in the past. Besides that, this figure means the hope that they can adapt to the circumstances or situations that exist in life, like chickens that know the time of darkness and light (Lebang, 2017: 59).



**Figure 7.** *Pa'manuk Londong motif*

(Source: South Sulawesi Disbudpar)

The Batak Karo traditional house has a variety of ornaments that always decorate its traditional house. This variety of ornaments is a symbol that contains a meaning that the Batak Karo people closely hold. Buffalo head is one of the ornamental varieties that must be in the Batak Karo traditional house. The buffalo head on top of the traditional house is a marker of the social status of the house owner. The more buffalo heads decorate the roof of the house, the higher the social status. Apart from being a marker of social status, the buffalo head is also symbolized as a symbol of fertility and honor (Erdansyah, 2011: 135). Buffalo has a vital role in the Batak Karo community, and this animal is used as a partner for farmers who work in rice fields. The community believes the buffalo head above their house is sacred and can be a guard or protector for the traditional house (Ginting, 2021: 125). The variety of ornaments that decorate traditional houses is used as a symbol full of meaning and as a typical creativity of indigenous peoples to decorate their traditional houses.



**Figure 8.** Ornamental Varieties in the Karo Batak Traditional House

(Source: Erdansyah, 2011)

**Table 1.** Comparison of Functions and Meanings of Ornamental Varieties in Traditional Houses

No.	Sa'o traditional house of Gurusina traditional village	Toraja tongkonan traditional house	Batak Karo traditional house
1	Traditional houses function as a gathering place for large families and as a sacred place to perform traditional ceremonies	Traditional houses function as a gathering place that has a function and role and social value for the Toraja people ( <a href="#">Muqoffa, 2016: 177-180</a> ).	Traditional houses in the Batak Karo community function as a sacred place
2	Depiction of each figure on the carving based on beliefs	Depictions of figures in carvings based on beliefs	Ornamental varieties that decorate traditional houses based on people's beliefs (
3	Each carved figure has a deep meaning about the philosophy of people's life	Each figure in the carving has its meaning ( <a href="#">Roosandriantini, 2018: 27</a> )	The variety of ornaments in the Batak karo traditional house contains sacred and profane meanings ( <a href="#">Sitanggang, 1991: 41</a> )
4	Buffalo as a sacrificial animal during a ceremony or ritual, the animal with the highest level in sacrifice in a ceremony or ritual	Buffalo as a sacred animal and a symbol of social status.	The buffalo is an animal that marks social status
5	chickens as sacrificial animals during ceremonies or rituals and as animals most often used in rituals	Chickens as animals that remind us of time for our ancestors ( <a href="#">Palembangan, 2021: 4</a> )	Chickens are not used as ornamental varieties in traditional houses
6	The meaning of figures in carvings is the hope of the community	The depiction of carved figures is the ideal of life of the Toraja people which is outlined in the carving	Ornamental varieties are only found in traditional houses or houses of people who have a high social status

### The Role of Buffalo and Chicken in the Gurusina Community

The Indigenous people of Gurusina village are many Christians. However, in practice, they still practice Animism beliefs ([Bate, 2023: 32](#)). This belief system makes the Gurusina people highly respect their ancestors with the presence of *watu ulu*, *watu wae*, *bhaga*, and *ngadhu* in the middle of their village, besides that the Gurusina people continue to practice rituals to respect their ancestors. The rituals carried out by the Gurusina people have almost the same pattern in each ritual, namely casting spells, killing sacrificial animals, collecting blood and applying blood to objects or places that are being ritualized, burning ritual animals, reading auscultation, processing ritual food, casting spells, feeding ancestors by taking part of the ritual food and finally eating together with the members who follow the ritual ([Diponegoro, 2021: 81](#)).

**Figure 9.** Chicken sacrifice in the ritual of 9 days of death

(source: Personal documentation, 2023)

Animal sacrifice is always carried out every time a ritual is held. Several animals, including chickens, pigs, and buffaloes, are used as a ritual medium. Of the three animals, only chickens and buffaloes whose figures are carved in *the weti* of the sa'o traditional house. The depiction of the two figures is inseparable from the role of chickens and buffaloes for the people of Gurusina. Chickens are animals used for victims in ritual processions, and they are most often used as a ritual medium because they are economical and easy to get. The Gurusina community must raise chickens in every family inhabiting the sa'o traditional house because the chicken will be used as a ritual medium. Buffalo as

a ritual medium is only used when a large ceremony is held, such as *Reba*. This is because the price of buffalo animals is quite expensive and difficult to obtain. When the sa'o traditional house performs a ritual with the buffalo victim, the buffalo horn will be stored in front of their house. The more horns are stored, indicating the older the house is. Chickens and buffaloes have a particular affinity with the Gurusina community because these two animals are often used for ritual media and have the highest level of ritual.



**Figure 10.** Buffalo horns in front of Sa'o's house

(Source: personal documentation, 2023)

## CONCLUSION

East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) has a diverse culture and traditions, which is characterized by the existence of five ethnic sub-groups, namely Manggarai-Riung, Ngada-Lio (consisting of Ranga, Maung, Ngadha, Nage, Keo, Palu languages), Mukang, Lamaholot, and Kedang. These five ethnic subgroups have cultures and languages that are different from each other, one of which is the Ngada-Lio ethnicity. The ethnic groups that inhabit Ngada Regency have many traditional villages spread across several points, including the Gurusina traditional village. Traditional villages are places to preserve the culture inherited by the ancestors, one of which is *weti*, a carving art culture inherited from generation to generation. *Weti* decorates the walls of the Sa'o traditional house in the Gurusina traditional village. The ornamental variety on the *weti* has various figures, including *Bhénga* and *Manu*. The two figures are the hallmarks of *weti* carvings in sa'o traditional houses, and their existence is also inseparable from the meaning and history that have been inherited from generation to generation by ancestors. *Bhénga* has depictions such as buffalo horns, and *manu* is depicted as a chicken. These two animals have a particular affinity for the Gurusina people, namely buffaloes and chickens, which are used as a medium for traditional rituals, so the two figures are carved on the interior of their houses.

Ornamental varieties in traditional houses exist in the Gurusina traditional village. They are found in several traditional houses in Indonesia, including the Tongkonan Toraja traditional house, the name of the *passura* ornamental variety, and the Batak Karo traditional house. The various ornamental figures in the traditional house have various kinds of figures. Among the similarities found in the three traditional houses are the figures of buffalo horns and chickens that decorate the traditional house. The two figures decorate the traditional house because the supporting community is closely connected to the two animals as a ritual medium. Besides that, chickens and buffaloes have their meanings and statuses by the people, so it is not surprising that the two animals are used as various ornamental figures in traditional houses. Various ornaments in the form of buffalo horns and chickens add aesthetic value to traditional houses and become a medium of local creativity for the community.

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