

RESERVING BROTHERHOOD AND KINDNESS: *MEGENGAN* TRADITION IN WELCOMING RAMADHAN MONTH

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ABSTRACT

This study discussed about Megengan tradition. Megengan tradition is a religious tradition in Javanese culture. This tradition started to grow up in society in a long history. The aims of this research are to explore and find meaningful messages in this unique tradition. Besides for welcoming Ramadhan, this tradition also for praying for our family member who had died. This tradition makes a unique characteristic in society, how culture and Islam are still conserved in one field although both of them are in different fields. It means that society do not avoid the tradition from their ancestry. The researchers used descriptive qualitative with ethnography design. This research's aim is to describe more detail about Megengan tradition in Ngancar, Wonogiri. The result of this research show that Megengan tradition still exist in society to conserve the old tradition.

Keywords: Megengan, brotherhood and kindness, tradition

1) INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a big country has a lot of cultures with some unique ceremonies (*ritual*). Woodwaad (2000: 69), Keesing (1975) and Sperber (1975) state that culture is a knowledge system and beyond conscious knowledge resides in the minds of individuals. Then, Koentjaraningrat says that culture is a whole system of ideas, and the work of human beings in order to become a society those human beings belong to learn. Almost same with Kooentjaraningrat, other expert Dr. K, Kupert says that culture is a set of ideas that guide and drives for the human in attitude and behavior, both individually and in groups. In culture, there also contains some ceremonies. Then according to Dhavamony (2000: 175) ceremony (*ritual*) separated into four, there are magic ritual, religious ritual, constitutive ritual, and fctative ritual. As an archipelago country, Indonesia has a main culture that grow up in the society. Indonesia also has a lot of tribes, and races, and local languages. All components are completing each other. Java itself has some cultures. Some cultural practices in Java are related to Islam because Javanese cultures also have a strong relationship with Islam. Islam in Java also flourishes the culture. Culture in Java is a result of acculturation with other cultures.

Before Islam grew up in Java, Budha and Hindu (*animisme*) had existed and almost all Javanese people believed in this religion. Then after Islam grow up in Java, Javanese people started to change their culture to be more Islamic. In Islam, believers are familiar with “8 bulan haram”. They are Muharram (*Suro*), Shafar (*Sapar*), Rabi’ul Awwal (*Mulud*), Rajab (*Rejeb*), Sya’ban (*Ramah*), Ramadhan (*Poso*) Dzulqa’dah (*Selo*), dan Dzulhijjah (*Besar*). Muslims often celebrate those months with some rituals. They are sacred moments for muslim. One of Javanese cultures that still exist called *Megengan*. It is a religious ritual tradition in Javanese culture in welcoming Ramadhan month. People invite their neighbors to attend their home. All participants in this culture pray together and one of them become the leader or in Islam called as Imam.

Besides for welcoming Ramadhan, this tradition is also for praying for family members who had died. They hope for goodness for their family. *Megengan* is conducted in Rajab month 3 until 4 weeks before Ramadhan. In this tradition they read the qur’an (like *yaasiin* and *tablil*). Then the meaning of *Megengan* is to stop the bad desire (*nafsu*), then *nafsu* can be separated into 3 types there are *nafsu amarah*, *nafsu Iawwamah*, *nafsu Mutmainah*.

This tradition is interesting to be investigated because this tradition combines between Islam culture and Javanese culture. It is an acculturation between two different fields. The researchers conducted this research in Ngancar village, Giriwoyo, Wonogiri. In this village, the society still carry on this tradition. It shows that people do not forget the tradition from ancient time and still pray for their family who had died. They believe in this tradition as the way to remember their family and pray for goodness. They believe that Islam and tradition cannot be separated, because they receive Islam with its culture. They also believe with their elders who had died (grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, etc). In addition, with this tradition they can remember about them and with reading Qur’an they hope they can send the best way for them. They hope they can get goodness (*berkah*) because this tradition starts in Rajab month before welcoming Ramadhan, a month that is full of goodness. So, from this tradition we can learn about love from family for other family who had died. *Megengan* is tradition based on the will of every person.

Previous research has been done by Kutbuddin Aibak in 2010 STAIN Tulungagung entitled *Fenomena tradisi megengan di Tulungagung*. This research dicussed about *Megengan* tradition in Tulungagung. He finds out that *Megengan* tradition is Islamic tradition to respect the family or relatives who have died. This research also describes about the differences between *Megengan* in the past and *Megengan* in the present.

The second similiar research was done by Adelagustin Ratna Indirayani in 2015 Program Studi S1 Sosiologi Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Gadjah Mada Yogyakarta entitled *Pergeseran tradisi megengan (studi tentang pergeseran tradisi megengan di ndalem mangkubumen)*. She discussed about *Megengan* tradition in Ndalem Mangkubumen.

The third previous research was done by Yuli Sagita in 2015 Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang entitled “*Filosofi Megengan: Tradisi menyambut Ramadhan Studi kasus di desa Wringinanom kec. Wringinanom kab. Gresik*”. She found out that this tradition was about hoping goodness from people to God. In *Megengan* tradition in Wringanom village people serve kue apem, pisang raja, and Nasi Golong.

This research has similarity with those ones mentioned above, that is describing *Megengan* tradition. It discusses how this tradition still exist in Javanese people. In fact, modern era cannot change people’s belief about this tradition. This research remains interesting since the location in different in terms of sociological perspectives. The research was conducted in Wonogiri, an area in central Jave which is different from the previous researches.

For society this tradition can bring some effect. They will learn about tradition and Islamic culture which become one thing. In society, especially in Java, it is important to respect the tradition. Society will appreciate their culture and their religion. It is very important because society will increase friendship and brotherhood among people. It is not only reading Qur'an (Yaasiin and Tahlil) but also tighten their relationship. The main goals in this tradition, besides to remember our family who have died, also to remember to our God (Allah Swt), muslim people who pray (Do'a) will help their family who have died and hope for heaven for goodness.

The society will learn about culture. They can learn old tradition mantained until now. The tradition in society also increases religiosity. Religious here means that society more care about God as the one and only helper. Then, in the modern era a lot people leave their tradition. In addition, if Javanese people do this tradition, it means that they keep the tradition and their religion. Some people say that modern era people care more about new tradition and leave old tradition.

This based on research paper discusses about Megengan tradition. The researchers want to explore and find meaningful messages in Megengan and how the society can apply this tradition for goodness.

2) METHODS

In this research, the researcher used descriptive qualitative research with ethnography design. In Collecting the data, the researcher uses observation and interview. Ethnography, embedded in an anthropological tradition, is essentially the study of a particular cultural group or phenomenon. Fieldwork is a fundamental part of that study, and for anthropologists, ethnographic fieldwork involves documenting people's beliefs and practices from the people's own perspectives. Observation is a main tool in an ethnographer's toolbox, and ethnographers spend a good deal of their time in the field observing, either as nonparticipant or participant observers. Participant observers take part in whatever is going on in the site in order to better understand the insider, or emic experience. The researcher as participant observer has the advantage of being immersed in the culture over an extended period and therefore in a position to discover what was 'hidden', but it became clear that the subjectivity of the researcher also has to be taken into account.

Ethnography is linked to the lived experience of the ethnographer (Berry, 2011). Rosen (1991) comments that there is no absolute truth of interpretation, but rather the value of the account lies in whether it is a plausible explanation for the data collected. The aim is to provide meaning for the culture under study, and the strength of ethnography lies in the use of more than one method (Reeves, Kuper and Hodges, 2008), this flexibility allowing for change as the research continues over time. In ethnographic research, data collection is tailored to meet the information needs of each study; the ethnographer determines the information required to address the research questions and design a mix of techniques to elicit that information. Then, for collecting the data the researcher used interview and observation.

Interview

Charles Stewart and W.B. Cash Said Interviews are a communication process paired with a serious and determined purpose designed to exchange behavior and involve frequently asked questions. In interview the researchers have some interview with respondents to collect the data. The researchers have six interviews with respondents to collect the data.

Observation

Suharsimi Arikunto said that observation is a direct observation of the physical environment or direct observation of an ongoing activity that encompasses all activity of attention to the object by

means of a sensory appraisal tool or work deliberately and consciously to collect data and implement systematic and appropriate procedures. The researcher did the observation four times to collect the data and supporting the argument.

3) RESULTS

This research was conducted in Ngancar village. This location is located in Giriwoyo, Wonogiri, Central Java. This population majority is muslim. Like a other village, this society is always full of peace and mutual cooperation. The society always respect to the responsibility and their religion. This village consists of some hamlets, there are Dumbendo, Dugringin, Jetis, Karangasem, Ngancar, Glonggong, Tapan, and Petir. These places are separated by mountain. In area Dumbendo, Dugringin, Jetis, Karangasem, and Ngancar namely *Ngancar Ngisor*. Then, Tapan, Glonggong, and Petir namely *Ngancar dumur*. It is unique situation because one village does not become one territory but separated into two. Then this village, although it is separated into two areas but the people have good communication and know each other well. It indicates that having large territory is not a big problem for this village.

In this village the society care each other very much and respect for their tradition, especially Megengan tradition. For this research, the researchers didn't conduct in all hamlets, but only 3, they were Dumbendo, Dugringin, and Jetis. These 3 hamlets always celebrate Megengan tradition regularly and it can be present how this tradition is always done in every welcoming Ramadhan month.

Based on the interview, Megengan tradition is old tradition for welcoming Ramadhan month and praying together for the family who had died. Before Islam became a religion confessed by most people in Java, the society believed Hindu and Budha tradition. They did not know about Islam. After Islam became big religion and spread especially in Ngancar village, the society start to practice Islamic tradition. The old tradition were not gone, because Islam tried to enter step by step.

Then slowly, society started to know Megengan tradition. Javaness culture respects their ancestry (*lelubur*) very much. In their believe, ancestry as the role model for them. Respecting to their ancestry means that they follow the rule in their religion. They believe that in Islam all believers should respect and always give their prayer. It is appropriate with al Qur'an as a guidance for muslim people.

In Ngancar village Megengan tradition started to grow after Islam grew in this village, ancestry (*lelubur*) started to make a responsibility for their ancestry who had died. In this era not all society celebrate this tradition because for the society this tradition is not suitable with their culture. But, after they got some Islamic knowledge, this tradition started to grow up step by step

In Ngancar village, we have some hamlets, but not do all society in all hamlets care about this tradition. In fact, the history of megengan in Ngancar was not clear to be explained (*interview with Bp. Mardi*) because it's old tradition and ancestry did this as their will. But basically, the steps of this tradition are still same until now.

This tradition show that the society has changed after Islam make a soft penetration. Penetration here means that Islam grow with love, peace, and calmness. With its characteristics, people received Islam by themselves. Culture of Islam started to be shown by *kyai/ustadz* who had good knowledge of Islam.

Guidance of Megengan tradition

In megengan tradition there are some guidance or rule that should be followed by participants. These rules may be different in other area. But in general, they are almost the same. the guidance in Ngancar village can be described as follows:

1. Every people or society who has an intention to do this tradition will invite their neighbors to come to their home. This tradition usually starts after *Maghrib*. Before that, people who has intention asks a person to invite people. Men usually pray and women help in the kitchen. In this tradition, people who has intention do not only pray, but also provide food as the way to do *sedeqah*. It is not special food, but it is served to respect the guest.
2. Before praying, the attendance makes a conversation. The aim of the conversation is making good relationship or in Islam called *ukhuwah*. Because they cannot meet every day, so this moment is used to maintain the relationship. They talk to each other about some issues.
3. After the leader (*ustadz, kyai*) came, praying is started. Before it, one of them tells first about the purpose for the host (*tuan rumah*), also appoint who will lead the ceremony.
4. After that the praying is started. All of people who attend in this tradition pray together with the leader (*imam*). In this tradition usually read *yaasiin and tablil*. If the participant does not bring Qur'an or yaasiin book, the host provide it.
5. The first is reading al *fatimah* as the *ummul kitab*, then followed by *yassin* and *tablil*. At the end the leader guide to pray together with the hand facing up. It is a hope to Allah SWT.
6. After that, the participants have a break to enjoy, they make conversation again.
7. Then, the host provide the food to eat together.
8. After the agenda is done, the participants go back to their home.

4) DISCUSSION

This tradition as a Javanese tradition has some history and make some effect for the society who still perform this tradition. it's not only about religion and culture but more than that, this tradition makes the society more understand how to respect their religion, culture, and also ancestry. This paper also discusses about advantages of this tradition. The data were achieved by interview.

Megengan tradition is a tradition based on Islamic culture

It is based on the ceremony that in this tradition people read the Quran, remember God, and remember they will die, and will be back to the creator (Allah SWT).

Conserve the tradition

In java a lot of traditions that still exist until now. Tradition in java have special features. With the society that still respects their tradition they will not leave their identity. People in Java have strong tradition that make them different from other society. Difference means they have something positive unique tradition in their activity.

Self-reminder

As a human we should remember about ourselves. We should learn what we should do in our life. Bad or good it is a choice. We as human, especially muslim always remember our God, Allah SWT, that we are just servant. Allah SWT and prophet Muhammad SAW also gave *Alquran* and *al hadist* as

a guidance. As a human we will be back to our Good, we will be asked by the angels for our responsibility.

Praying is the best way for a muslim

As a muslim, we know that besides effort we must pray. Pray is the best way for a muslim when hoping something. Allah as a God is near from us. With praying, Allah will receive our hope.

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ
دَاخِرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you; surely those who are too proud for My service shall soon enter hell abased (QS. Ghafir: 60).

In other Surah, Allah SWT says:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا
بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely, I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way (QS. Al- Baqarah: 186).

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ﴿١٥٢﴾

Therefore, remember Me, I will remember you, and be thankful to Me, and do not be ungrateful to Me (QS. Al- Baqarah: 152).

And remember your Lord within yourself in humility and in fear without being apparent in speech-in the mornings and evenings. And do not be among the heedless. (QS. All A'raf: 205)

In addition, Allah SWT is very near if we want to pray. Allah will respond us with love. In this tradition contain is praying in hoping kindness, may Allah give the best for ancestry who had died. Yaasiin and tahlil are as a symbol of expectancy.

1. Keep the relationship (ukhuwah)

In Islam relationship or usually called ukhuwah is very important. As a human we must have a good relationship with other. We can't live alone; we should be live together.

The society also have reason to keep conserving this tradition. Some factors make them believe in this tradition. Based on the interview the researcher can conclude that:

- a. This tradition is based on the will of society. It is shown in the following transcript of interview:

"This tradition is carried out for good, and every community is ingrained with this tradition, bro, so the desire of the community for Ramadan must be strong to carry out this tradition".

It can be good activity in welcoming, it means that the society has an awareness to conserve old tradition.

b. For a generosity (*sodaqoh*)

Although, it needs much money to arrange this tradition, but society does not care. They just assume that money is for ourselves but also for others or *sodaqoh*.

“Ah yes, sir, indeed when we do megengan we need money to provide food for the congregation and others, but for us residents it is not a problem, it becomes sodaqoh for us. The point is that megengan prays when we are going to Ramadan and also prays for our ancestors, so yes, we are sincere and we intend only for good...”

c. To keep conserving relationship among society

In village, society gives more attention in relationship with neighbor. Megengan tradition also make an effect to makes more better relationship, although Megenagn is not only one way to maintain relationship but if they meet each other in one moment it can be better.

“For us villagers, whose name is friendship, it's still very deeply intertwined, bro, so I think it will also have a positive impact on friendship, right there we can talk to talk about something, so basically we can maintain relations between neighbors more”.

d. Mixing between Islam, culture, and respect

Islam is peace and respectful religion. There is no discrimination in Islam. It is the same with this tradition. It is a good tradition in Islam. For society it is free tradition. It means that people who still do this tradition is good but for those who don't have capability to do so, it's not a problem.

“... Islam is a religion of peace, man, there is no coercion and discrimination in Islam, the relationship with this tradition is that there is no coercion in this tradition either, for those who have the intention, please do it, for those who don't, it's okay, bro.”.

In addition, this tradition is not only tradition, but it is special thing for the society. It can be the way to make a good relationship and keep conserving old tradition to respect our ancestry.

People believe that life is arranged by God. Accordingly, they believe that everything happened has been arranged by God, including the time of the people's death, the place of the death, any losses that will be experienced, and who will stay longer. All have been arranged by God. Such belief in fate forms a submission attitude towards the life, including the impacts they receive. This condition is analogous to the rotation of the wheel of life (*Javanese: cakera mangilingan*), sometimes we are down, sometimes we are up. They accept of (*Javanese: nerima*) what is going on, although in this case it does not mean they are silent and do nothing. They try to regain their living conditions after their relatives passed away. They accept living conditions by working hard and motivating themselves to immediately rise from the despair of life (*nerima ing pandum*).

In line with the awareness that life is always rotating like a wheel, they always aware and alert (*eling lan waspodo*) in acting and also *ajo dumeb* and *ajo aji mumpung*. The moral message becomes more meaningful when they have to stay living on the earth. A prudent attitude to maintain balance of relationships with fellow human beings and God becomes absolutely necessary to be done to emerge from the deterioration of life.

The sincerity (Java: accept) and gratitude concepts are a form of expressions to indicate the level of submission to God. Although it is difficult to describe the level of expression of sincere because it is very abstract, one of the expressions can be detected in the way they respond to events that happened to them by not regretting or being sad towards changes in their lives that occur.

The submission attitude expressed in sincerity and gratitude are strengthened with religious activities in their residence. Through religious gathering they perform religious activities carried out

in Megengan celebration. It is led by a local figure, performed by the reciting Al-Quran of Yasin chapter and doing the prayer together.

People believe that *Megengan* is one of their rational actions. Weber mentions (1978: 22) that rational action is action taken to achieve the goal and highly subjective which it depends on who is doing. Furthermore, according to Karberg, person's action is based on the rational choice and the capacity of themselves. In other words, the rational action is taking into account the gains and losses of its action.

The action of people to keep living is related to some of the values that they believe or feel. They acquire a sense of comfort and obtain security guarantee, mainly because they still have and feel attached to the land. They grow and develop with the value system of the village people that make them different from others. Whatever the environmental conditions, the land they have should be retained. According to Winangun (2004: 74), local actions are used to retain the land because for resident it is not only a source of livelihood but also a source of comfort of life. In line with Winangun's view, Weber (1978: 24) also states that one perform an action to achieve the goal of the comforts of life. Although, according to Weber, such comfort is abstract and relative because it depends on who performs and interprets such action.

For people, land at in their village is a source for enjoyment of life, because they are born and grow up to be citizens in that region. Moreover, the life values of the people was formed long time ago. In addition, the land becomes heritage from generation to generation, so that his estate becomes evidence to determine the family tree. Thus for the citizens, the land is a symbol of self-esteem is it are known as *sedumuk bathuk senyari bumi*. This concept means that every piece of land has worth and meaning that stored in the minds of citizens. This is clearly revealed through their daily language. This concept is often expressed by the citizens of Java in particular to demonstrate the importance of land for farmers.

Giriwoyo people use local action of Megengan celebration to show the attitude of submission and thanks to God. The people have the concept of *nerimo ing pandum*. The concept of sincerity and *nerima ing pandum*, according to Imron and Hidayat (2012 : 207-228), is the value existing in the public mind that comes from the religious values which is referred as theological construction and cultural values inherited from ancestors. It which is called cultural construction. Both theological and cultural construction are used to explain how Giriwoyo people interpret life cycles..

Religion became an amplifier factor for them to survive in between happiness and sadness. In addition, their culture did not ask them to stay hopeless, unmotivated and some other negative motives, Such beliefs then makes religious followers feel protected so that they will feel comfortable in performing a variety of activities to reorganize their life. In this context, religion is a coping mechanism to survive (Ghozali, 2008: 103-131).

The mutual cooperation among the people is evidence that the solidarity of residents has strengthened as a result of the brotherhood. This is similar to what has been expressed by Abdullah (2009) that the solidarity of has its ups and downs. There are times when solidarity weaken because one puts more emphasis on personal interest. However, there are times when solidarity strengthen because people mutually help each other. Giriwoyo residents provided mutual assistance among fellow, so that by strengthening the solidarity people could repair their neighborhoods.

It seems that the strengthening of solidarity is not only solidarity that comes from within or in the term Durkheim 1965 (quoted Turner & Beeghley, 1981:334) is a mechanical solidarity, but also organic solidarity. According to Durkheim, the organic solidarity is the solidarity that comes from

outside the community. The form of solidarity is the development of mechanical solidarity. Organic solidarity grows in society that is more professional in the division of labor. Nevertheless, the solidarity actually requires the existence of entanglement among the part of the community with other parts. Thus, although its members do not know each other, but there is an intensified relationship between citizens.

Citizens living in their own culture have to protect civility. Civility is an important normative component in developing the civil society. Civility here is understood as attributive recognition of society members towards both individual and communal rights. In civil society, everyone's human rights are respected, appreciated, and highly valued. Every citizen could take the benefit of his/her rights to determine their own lives so that both personal and group dictatorship and even authoritarian majority eliminating the minority do not have opportunity to live (Khatami, 1997: 3). In this Islamic point of view, civil society actually is not a society where only Moslems are given their rights and considered as citizen but everyone has the same rights in the name of laws. The government has main responsibility to protect these rights. Such society never wants to dominate as well as to be dominated (Khatami, 1997: 3-4).

5) CONCLUSION

Religion and tradition are like a coin. They are cannot be separated although they are different fields. In fact, religion grows up with tradition. From the history, Walisongo spread Islam religion in Java with cultural approach. For example, *Sunan Kalijaga* with *wayang kulit*. It's one of evidence that tradition and religion are applied together in society. Megengan tradition also started by Javanese tradition and culture, then Islam started to develop in the society.

In this tradition, although it's based on culture but it does not avoid Islamic view. Megengan tradition precisely inserts Islamic view when society perform this tradition. It can be seen from the ceremony of reading Qur'an (*Yassiin* and *Tablil*). It is as a reversing brotherhood among people in the society and hoping kindness for a member who had died. This tradition is also for welcoming Ramadhan month, the great month for muslim. Some people believe that this tradition makes them care more about their ancestry. In this case we can say that the society always respect and are not egoistic. Javanese people are famous for their respectful and polite attitude. Finally, this tradition also shows that Javanese people still have a strong character.

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