

THE TRADITION OF SAFAR IN BALAI BEACH VILLAGE, SERUWAY SUBDISTRICT, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the background and process of the Kenduri Safar tradition in Kampung Pantai Balai, Seruway District, Aceh Tamiang Regency. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study explores the cultural significance and ritual practices surrounding the annual Kenduri Safar event held during the Islamic month of Safar. The community observes this sacred month with prohibitions, such as avoiding travel and high-speed motorbike riding, to protect themselves from potential dangers. The Kenduri Safar ritual is performed to ward off disasters, seek protection from harm, strengthen solidarity, and enhance social relations. The ritual involves the active participation of community members, including traditional leaders, religious figures, and the public, who engage in various activities such as preparation, communal cooking, prayers, and shared meals. These activities aim to foster unity and preserve local cultural identity. The Kenduri Safar is deeply rooted in Islamic religious practices while incorporating unique local customs, such as special foods and prayers conducted by the riverside. Through this ritual, the community strengthens its bonds and upholds its cultural traditions. This research highlights the importance of the Kenduri Safar ritual as a means of preserving local heritage and fostering communal solidarity in Aceh Tamiang.

Keywords: Ritual, Travel Feast, Ward Off Evil.

INTRODUCTION

According to Koentjaraningrat (2009), society is a human community that interacts according to a specific system of customs and traditions, which is continuous and bound by a sense of shared identity. The continuity of society has four characteristics, namely interaction, customs and traditions, time, and identity (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Culture is a system of meanings and symbols used by individuals to define their world, express their feelings, and make judgments (Geertz, 1973). Customs are patterns of behavior and actions that are recognized and carried out by society, not derived from customary law or tradition (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Koentjaraningrat (2009) describes culture as the entire system of ideas, actions, and human creations in the context of social life, consisting of three forms: a complex of ideas, patterned activities and actions, and objects produced by humans. The structure of culture encompasses seven universal cultural elements, namely: religious and belief systems, social systems and organizations, knowledge systems, language, artistic systems, subsistence systems, and technological systems and tools (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

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Religion plays an important role in social life. The anthropological theory of religion understands religion from an anthropological perspective, which combines cultural, social, and human evolutionary studies (Hasbullah et al., 2017). Religion and culture influence each other reciprocally (Hasbullah et al., 2017). Religion as a symbolic endeavor is a system of symbols that communicates with the universe (Van Baal, 1971 in Radam, 2001). Symbols function as a shield that protects individuals from their extreme tendencies to achieve their goals directly (Van Baal, 1971 in Radam, 2001). According to Agus (2007: 80) in Gadis (2019: 27), sacred means holy. The opposite of sacred is profane, which is ordinary, natural. Sacredness is a concept related to something that is considered holy or sacred in various cultures and traditions. The sacredness of a Safar feast in Kampung Pantai Balai is reflected in various elements that unite spiritual, cultural, and social aspects. The Safar feast is held with the intention of asking for safety and protection from God. The month of Safar is often seen as a time full of danger or calamity, so the prayers and rituals performed are intended to ward off calamity and avoid danger. The sacredness of the ritual also stems from the sincere intentions of the community who hope to receive blessings and protection during the month of Safar. It is this sincere intention within the community that adds a spiritual dimension and sanctity to the ritual being performed.

Susanne Langer argues that rituals are not merely psychological but logical expressions of objectified symbols (Chaplin, 2021). Rituals function as mechanisms for reinforcing social solidarity (Durkheim & Fields, 1995). These symbols shape the character of worshippers by expressing behavior and feelings. Ceremonies can be classified as seasonal or non-seasonal. Seasonal rituals occur at predetermined times based on natural cycles, while non-seasonal ceremonies take place during times of crisis. Both types of ceremonies are present in all societies. Religious rituals and ceremonies regulate religious behavior and consist of four components: place, time, object/instrument, and performer. The performance of rituals is based on beliefs and awareness of their meaning and significance. Turner identified four roles of rituals in society (Turner et al., 2017). First, rituals eliminate conflict by providing an outlet for negative feelings. Second, rituals overcome divisions and build social solidarity by reinforcing core values and principles. Third, rituals unify conflicting principles within society. Fourth, rituals provide new strength and motivation for social life, deepening and internalizing group values. Ceremonies aim to change human or natural conditions, ensuring rapid and comprehensive change to the desired final condition. Ceremonies also function as social control, regulating behavior, mental states, feelings, and values within a group in a conservative manner for the benefit of society as a whole. Dhavamony (1995: 241) defines prayer as a recollective act that unites humans with the divine. Prayer is a universal form of worship practiced in various ways. Prayer is an important religious expression that transcends all religions, emphasizing spiritual factors. In the Safar feast tradition in Kampung Pantai Balai, prayer is a key component for safety and protection. Led by an imam, the community prays together to ward off disasters. Prayer is a means of seeking protection and avoiding danger, strengthening spiritual bonds, and fostering unity. Prayer bridges the gap between the divine and the profane, creating a divine presence among humans. The kenduri tradition highlights the importance of prayer in facing

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challenges collectively. Prayer in kenduri focuses on seeking safety and protection from God, strengthening spiritual relationships, and bringing the divine into human life. Prayer reflects cultural values and norms, serving emotional, symbolic, social, and spiritual functions. Prayer is a vital element in rituals, symbolizing human existence and creating meaning. According to Geertz (1973), prayer is a religious symbol that instills a deep mood and motivation. Prayer is not merely an individual act but a social practice that reflects cultural values and social structures. The Kenduri Safar follows the customs and traditions that have been passed down through generations. Adherence to these traditions gives the ritual sacred value and ensures that it is carried out with respect and devotion. Every element in the feast, from the prayers to the food served, has its own symbolism and meaning that adds to the sacredness of the ritual. For example, before eating together, a communal prayer is recited, which has a specific meaning and is believed by the community to bring safety. The food served is often seen as an offering and an expression of gratitude to God. Meanwhile, according to Cailois in (Agus, 2007: 81-82) as cited by Gadis Anastasia (2019: 29), sacredness is a type of religious feeling that is attributed to objects believed to be sacred, thereby granting them special treatment or characteristics. Sacredness renders these objects inaccessible or incomprehensible through rational means. Sacredness is an idea that stems from religion. Prayers are focused on requests for protection and the rejection of calamities. The sacredness of these rituals lies in the belief that through prayer, God will hear and grant their requests, providing protection from all dangers. The people of Kampung Pantai Balai believe in the spiritual power of prayer and rituals to ward off calamities. This belief provides deep spiritual strength and meaning, making the kenduri ritual a sacred act full of hope. In Kampung Pantai Balai, the Kenduri Safar ritual is a significant cultural event. This ritual is performed every year in the second month of the Islamic calendar, known as Safar. The people of Balai Beach Village consider Safar to be a holy month with various prohibitions, such as avoiding travel and riding motorcycles at high speeds. The Kenduri Safar ritual is believed to provide a sense of safety and peace. The ceremony is attended by villagers and involves the rejection of a ball, a symbolic act. Even in a technologically advanced society, this ritual persists, highlighting the importance of this cultural practice. This study aims to analyze the factors underlying the implementation of the Kenduri Safar Ritual in Pantai Balai Village, Seruway District. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the process of conducting the Kenduri Safar Ritual in Pantai Balai Village, Seruway District. The benefits of this research include understanding the principles in the field of anthropology, particularly religious anthropology related to rituals, as well as developing and analyzing the rituals and belief systems of the Pantai Balai Village community. Other benefits include serving as a reference in the field of anthropology related to religious anthropology regarding cultural rituals and being useful for further research. Additionally, the community can benefit as the subject of religious tourism studies based on education related to religion and culture rooted in local wisdom that still exists and is practiced.

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METHODS

Ethnography is described as a naturalistic qualitative method focused on understanding people within their social and cultural environments (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Ethnography is a naturalistic and anthropological research method that aims to understand people in their social and cultural environments. The research process includes interviews with key stakeholders, religious leaders, and community members in Pantai Balai Village, Seruway District, Aceh Tamiang Regency. The data collection techniques used in this study are participant observation, interviews, and documentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant observation involves researchers participating in the daily activities of the community being observed. In this study, researchers will participate in the seedling, planting, plant care, harvesting, and post-harvesting processes (Seran et al., 2024). This will allow researchers to observe the research objects directly and obtain information firsthand. Interviews will be conducted in an unstructured manner, where the researcher does not use a pre-prepared interview guide. Interviews will be conducted based on the research theme and will develop according to the informants' answers. Interviews will be conducted from the informants' perspective, and the researcher will record the results of the interviews using tools such as mobile phones, tape recorders, or notebooks. Documentation includes the collection of data and information in the form of books, archives, documents, written figures, and images. The documentation produced can be visual, such as pictures, videos, or audio recordings of the researcher and informants. The tools used can be mobile phones, cameras, and recording devices. Documentation can also be in the form of field notes that help researchers remember the situation and conditions at the time of the interview (Lubis & Sari, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Government Strategic Initiatives for Toll Road Development

Seruway Subdistrict, Aceh Tamiang Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia, consists of 24 villages with a total population of 27,608 people. (Source: Central Statistics Agency, Decision of the Head of the Central Statistics Agency No. 649 of 2023 on the Codes and Names of Statistical Work Areas for the Year 2023 dated September 29, 2023). Pantai Balai Village, located in Seruway Subdistrict, is a coastal area with direct access to water bodies. The village is surrounded by oil palm and rubber plantations, which serve as the primary livelihood for its residents. The topography is predominantly low-lying with wet lands, making it prone to flooding and erosion. The population is predominantly Muslim, reflecting the general characteristics of Acehnese society. Religious life is deeply ingrained, with mosques and meunasah (traditional Acehnese community halls) serving as centers for religious activities. The area is known for its natural resources, particularly in the fisheries and palm oil sectors. However, it faces threats such as flooding caused by heavy rains and rising sea levels, as well as erosion that can damage coastal areas. Despite these challenges, the people of Pantai Balai Village continue to lead a simple lifestyle, valuing mutual cooperation and local wisdom. The month of Safar in Islam is often seen as a month of trials and challenges. In some communities, people respond by holding Kenduri Safar, a tradition

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involving reciting prayers, cooking, and eating together to seek protection from Allah (Rahmansah et al., 2024). This tradition also includes providing food to be distributed to the community. Although some communities have abandoned the Kenduri Safar because they consider it inconsistent with Islamic teachings, others continue to celebrate it as part of their cultural heritage. Maritah, a 62-year-old religious leader, explains that the Kenduri Safar has been held since the time of her ancestors. The Kenduri Safar takes place on the last Wednesday of every Safar month and cannot be replaced by another day. The Safar ritual tradition is held on the banks of a river and includes a journey past sacred tombs. Participants prepare food, which is not taken home afterwards, as it is believed to be an offering to the king of the forest or tigers. The Kenduri Safar includes a series of activities, such as cleaning the event site, preparing equipment and ingredients, cooking food, praying together, and eating together. This tradition aims to create, celebrate, or strengthen spiritual, cultural, or social bonds.

Before the event, the community gathers at the Matsah house, where shared items are stored. They collect items such as cooking pots, spoons, stoves, buckets, machetes, and firewood, which are then transported by rickshaw. The first stage is to move the firewood from Matsah's house to the event location using simple tools such as axes, machetes, or saws. Collecting firewood is very important because it is used for cooking. The wood is usually obtained from fallen trees, dry branches, or twigs. Before use, wet wood must be dried, either by storing it or arranging it in an open area exposed to sunlight. Preparations for the kenduri safar begin in the afternoon with the collection of equipment such as firewood, pots, and cooking utensils. At the event location, the community brings their own seating mats from home, symbolizing equality, togetherness, and brotherhood in the community. Upon arrival at the location, residents help unload items, chat, perform the Dhuhur prayer, and clean the event area. Some light fires for cooking, burn trash, prepare seating areas, and assist in preparing food. The Kenduri Safar is a communal cooking tradition aimed at strengthening community bonds. The event is participated in by men, women, and children, reflecting the spirit of cooperation. Food ingredients, including spices and grated coconut, are donated by the participants. Before cooking, the ingredients are mixed and stirred. Two types of food are cooked during the Kenduri Safar: chicken curry and goat curry. The community brings their own free-range chickens, which symbolize the simplicity and authenticity of rural life. In addition to cooking, the community also collects clean water for cooking and washing. Some people brought water in gallons, while others helped fetch water from the river. The free-range chickens were brought to be donated, with no age restrictions. The Kenduri Safar tradition is an event that promotes cooperation, community involvement, and charity. It is an opportunity for the community to gather, cook, and share food while upholding traditional values. The slaughtering of chickens or goats is one of the forms of sacrificial worship for Muslim communities. This activity is carried out with sincere intentions to ward off disasters and seek blessings from Allah SWT. The slaughtering is performed in accordance with religious guidelines, beginning with a prayer. The sacrificial chickens and goats are brought by the community for the Safar feast, an event to seek protection. The slaughtering is performed by the village imam, who is considered an expert in the process. The sacrificial

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animal is held firmly, then slaughtered by cutting its throat while reciting a prayer. After slaughtering, the animal is checked to ensure it is truly dead. This year, one of the villagers, Kak Yah, vowed to donate a sacrificial goat for the Safar holiday as an expression of gratitude for his recovery from a long-standing illness. The slaughtering of the sacrificial goat was performed by the village imam and is believed to protect someone from existing illnesses. The slaughtering of chickens or goats is carried out by authorized individuals, such as the village imam, in accordance with religious and customary practices. The animals are held by several people, and before being slaughtered, a prayer is recited. The slaughtering is performed facing the qibla, and the animal is cut until its neck is severed.

The dead animals are prepared for cooking. Goats are skinned and cleaned by men, while women boil chickens to remove their feathers. No part of the goat is wasted, except for its excrement. The cleaned goats are cut into pieces for cooking. A large area along the riverbank is used for washing and cleaning the goats and chickens. The animals are cooked over a large fire by boiling them. The cleaning process is a communal activity called *rewang*, where members gather to help cook and prepare the dishes. The chickens are washed twice, first with river water, then with clean water brought by the community. *Rewang* is a form of mutual cooperation and solidarity that lightens the burden of cooking. It also serves as a place for community members to gather, interact, and strengthen social bonds. *Rewang* involves various tasks, from cooking to preparing the venue for the communal prayer ceremony. It is a means of introducing the tradition of the *kenduri safar* to younger generations. Chicken and goat that have been cleaned and cut are cooked using large woks and shared fires. Older women usually handle the cooking, while others clean the seating area. After *Ashar* prayer, the community gathers at the *kenduri safar* location in Kampung Pantai Balai. Seating is separated between men and women. The imam begins the event by reciting prayers to ward off misfortune. After prayers, all residents eat together, enjoying white rice, chicken, and goat curry. Any food brought from home that is not finished must not be taken home, as it is believed to bring misfortune. After eating, the community cleans up and returns home. This communal meal signifies strengthening social bonds, expressing gratitude, and celebrating togetherness. Participants eat together without distinguishing social status or background, fostering a sense of unity and harmony. Guests bring rice that is collected to be distributed to the community. The rice is then distributed to each family and to those who did not bring rice. Before eating, a prayer is recited together. Food is distributed in large portions so that everyone gets a share. Eating together must be done with mutual respect, and it is hoped that everyone eats in an orderly manner. This communal meal strengthens social bonds and mutual trust among people. Salamah, 62 years old, mentioned that during the *kenduri safar*, food is always sufficient, and eating together holds various meanings, such as expressing gratitude, preserving local culture, strengthening family ties, and fostering communication and interaction among people.

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CONCLUSION

The Kenduri Safar is a tradition that reflects the community's belief in protection from disasters, the strengthening of social bonds, and local cultural identity. It is held during the month of Safar, which is believed to have negative energy, and involves a series of activities, such as gathering, praying, and sharing food. Elements of the kenduri safar, such as specific foods and special prayers, have symbolic meanings that represent hope, protection, and gratitude. Food is often prepared together, symbolizing mutual cooperation and strengthening social solidarity. This tradition plays an important role in understanding the fundamental values that shape the identity and social life of the community. This tradition connects spirituality, culture, and social relationships, providing insight into how traditions can survive and evolve amid social change. Research on the kenduri safar can have implications for the maintenance and strengthening of cultural identity and social solidarity. This research can help identify how communities preserve or adapt their culture in the face of changing times, providing input for policies that support the preservation of local culture. The symbolic meaning of the kenduri safar can be integrated into education to teach values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and gratitude. This tradition can serve as an important tool for addressing the challenges of modernization without losing cultural roots. A deep understanding of the symbolic meaning and social values of the kenduri safar can strengthen cultural identity, build social solidarity, and contribute to the preservation of local cultural traditions.

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