

## The *Ramadan Punggahan* Tradition in North Sumatra: Investigating the Javanese Nuanced Practicalities in Langkat Regency

M. Nasihudin Ali<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of History of Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Social Science,  
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia*

### Abstract

Javanese people still observe the *Punggahan* ritual before the month of Ramadan, particularly those who live in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the origins of this practice, how it has evolved, and what the *Punggahan* tradition means to the Javanese residing in Sekoci Village, Besitang District. A qualitative research methodology is employed in this study. Qualitative data was gathered via library research and interviews. The Javanese community in Sekoci village, Besitang District, is undergoing changes in the way their *Punggahan* ritual is being carried out. When a group gathers in a mosque or prayer room, the menu is different. This results from the integration of Javanese and Malay culture. This integration resulted in the creation of a specific cuisine that is required at every *Punggahan* ritual celebration in Sekoci Village, Besitang District. Meat is typically offered on the menu. The tradition of embracing Ramadan in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, originated from this blending of Javanese and Malay customs. The research explores how local communities negotiate the cultural identities that have been transported with them from their home environments to new ones, whereupon they come together to create a new cultural construction. This study serves as a case study of cultural integration and evolution. It demonstrates the importance of adapting traditional practices to contemporary contexts while maintaining their essential cultural significance.

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*Masyarakat Jawa masih menjalankan ritual Punggahan menjelang bulan Ramadan, khususnya yang tinggal di Desa Sekoci, Kecamatan*

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\*Corresponding Author: M. Nasihudin Ali (mnasihudinali@uinsu.ac.id), Faculty of Social Science, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Jl. Kenangan Baru, Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency, Sumatra Utara 20225, Indonesia.

*Besitang, Kabupaten Langkat, Provinsi Sumatera Utara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui asal-usul praktik ini, bagaimana praktik ini berkembang, dan apa makna tradisi Punggahan bagi masyarakat Jawa yang tinggal di Desa Sekoci, Kecamatan Besitang. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui penelitian kepustakaan dan wawancara. Masyarakat Jawa di Desa Sekoci, Kecamatan Besitang, mengalami perubahan dalam cara pelaksanaan ritual Punggahan. Ketika sebuah kelompok berkumpul di masjid atau mushalla, menu yang disajikan berbeda. Hal ini merupakan hasil dari perpaduan budaya Jawa dan Melayu. Perpaduan ini menghasilkan masakan khas yang wajib ada di setiap perayaan ritual Punggahan di Desa Sekoci, Kecamatan Besitang. Daging biasanya menjadi salah satu menu yang disajikan. Tradisi menyambut Ramadan di Desa Sekoci, Kecamatan Besitang, berawal dari perpaduan adat Jawa dan Melayu ini. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana masyarakat lokal menegosiasikan identitas budaya yang telah dibawa dari lingkungan asal mereka ke lingkungan yang baru, di mana mereka bersatu untuk menciptakan konstruksi budaya yang baru. Penelitian ini menunjukkan pentingnya mengadaptasi praktik-praktik tradisional ke dalam konteks kontemporer dengan tetap mempertahankan signifikansi budaya yang esensial.*

**Keywords:** Besitang; existence; Javanese community; tradition; welcoming Ramadan

## Introduction

It is social groups, culture, institutions, power dynamics, and stratification that create society as a social construct. Additionally, there exists a dominant dialectical relationship between cosmology and economic patronage. Cosmology resonates in various ways with both social capital—an essential component of the structure of relations between actors and specific actions in society—and economic interests as a dominant force. In order to establish social standards that are accepted by different existing groups, social groups engage in dynamic processes. A viewpoint and adaptation to survive in social space can be obtained by comprehending social agents' interpretation of the environment. Actions taken in the social sphere materialize group interests. Social standards emerged over a protracted dialectical process, sometimes imitatively, and are frequently utilized as a shared reference. The existing family and community institutions have been increasingly sharing religious ideas and regulations. In contrast,

social norms are intentionally created and bind one another to establish social order (Chakim, 2022).

The natural riches and cultural diversity of Indonesia are well-known. The traditions and habits of different ethnic groups can contribute to the development of this illness. Customs that are still followed by the community are known as traditions because they were handed down from ancestors. Javanese people always remember and honour their predecessors who established a system that governs every part of life by following their traditions (Alviawati et al., 2018). For some social groupings, the continuation of traditions is a symbol and a sense of identity. Javanese culture encompasses a wide range of topics, including behaviour, grammar, the life cycle, and belief systems within the community. Even legally binding customs have evolved from traditions. According to some Javanese people, they will suffer catastrophe in the future if they follow their ancestors' customs (Setyawan et al., 2022; Susanti & Lestari, 2021).

Religious practice has greatly influenced Indonesian civilization. As Muslims make up the vast majority of Indonesians, there are countless ways in which culture, religion, and regional customs interact, and Muslims keep making efforts to acculturate with the local customs. Thus, local customs and culture are preserved and passed down from generation to generation (Aliyas & Putra, 2020).

Culture and religion are society's two most significant facets due to their powerful impact on social life. It will be challenging for Islam to gain acceptance in a community group that already follows local customs if it does not incorporate the local customs (Faris, 2014). However, Islamic teachings will be pretty simple in impacting the community when they blend in with culture and customs. Similar to how the Prophet Muhammad spread Islam throughout Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad had to consider the elements of tradition that had always been a part of Arab civilization in places where the Arab community followed its traditions and customs. There are several explanations for the verse's revelation, pointing to the process of molding Islam to fit the needs of contemporary society. The verse's revelation explains the factors that led to the development of teaching that blended with regional customs to create new traditions within the

community, such as the Javanese community extending its greetings during Ramadan in Sekoci Village (Ali, 2023b).

A group of people will eventually become a community group and interact with one another to establish society. In a typical society, agreements established by community members and adhered to by all community groups form the basis of regulations. Whether in the form of routines, laws of life, or beliefs that create the identity and identity of a group or nation, there are habits in society that will eventually become traditions that the following generation must uphold and then become a product or cultural legacy (E. Muhammad, 2022).

Before Islam arrived, several religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism, were practiced in Java. Muslim preachers attempted to incorporate some elements of these religions into Islam rather than rejecting them altogether, which resulted in the development of vernacular Islamic tradition. The best illustration of this is *slametan*, or communal religious rites that involve serving different food offerings to participants and, in some instances, to the spirits of the dead and ancestors. These rituals are widespread among Muslim communities and traditionally more oriented towards Javanese traditions (Nasir, 2019).

A tradition is an ongoing behavior that permeates society, is passed down to the following generation, and has become an integral aspect of that society's way of life. The *ijtihad* of ulama and local leaders within each community also contribute to forming traditions (Halim, 2006, p. 99). According to Funk and Wagnalss in Muhaimin, tradition is the beliefs, customs, knowledge, and behaviors transmitted to each group from one generation to the next and followed by the next generation (Muhaimin AG, 2001).

Javanese customs can take many different forms in daily life. They might include conventions, customary rites or rituals, language usage, clothing styles, or even the manifestation of the community's cultural output, such as literature and art. The Kendurior Selamatetan tradition is one that ethnic groups on the Indonesian island of Java follow. Javanese customs can take

many different forms in day-to-day life. They might include standards, customary rites or rituals, language usage, clothing styles, or even representations in the community's artistic and literary works. The *Punggahan* custom is one of the customs (Purwanto, 2017; Setyawan et al., 2022).

Islamic tradition is the method by which a faith can impose regulations on each of its adherents, laws that are expected to be followed in day-to-day existence. Bart clarified that an individual's traditions are Islamic if they possess an Islamic soul. If any of its followers cannot follow, it should not force them to do so. Despite this, local groups continue to practice numerous types of traditions that Islam itself did not create. For instance, Javanese culture is rich in subtle Hindu cultural elements that the Walisongo exploits to spread Islam throughout the region (N. Muhammad, 2012, p. 2).

When discussing traditions, it is impossible to separate them from the numerous customs that support each community's preservation of the customary order and values passed down through the generations and acknowledged in the *ushul fiqh* rules. One Islamic custom the Javanese community observes in honor of Ramadan is the *Punggahan* tradition (Solichin, 2010, p. 264). There are few variances in people's opinions towards tradition because most people comprehend it. According to Kuntowijoyo, culture is the product of human creation employing the soul and body, and it manifests itself in realizing human happiness on an individual and collective level (Kuntowijoyo, 2006).

The Islamic manifestations of Indonesian Muslims are incredibly varied in style. Its expansion and advancement are impacted not only by theological but also by other understanding elements, such as social and cultural dimensions that shape the viewpoint of Islamic society (Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022). Three categories of studies are commonly used to categorize research on local groups negotiating their identities against a dominant culture that has permeated their surroundings: fluidity, flexibility, and original culture towards a new setting, which together create a cultural construction that is distinct from the previous one (Muttaqin & Noor, 2022).

Every culture relies heavily on tradition to uphold its customs and practices. It incentivizes every community group to act in a way that upholds the applicable laws and moral standards their organization must adhere to (Arifin, 1984, p. 84). Islam refers to tradition as *urf*. *Urf* is everything the human mind accepts as good and that society deems good (Khalil, 2009, p. 167). In other words, *urf* is everything ingrained in a society's customs and beliefs, typically consisting of words and acts (Zein, 2005). Scholars assert that every individual and community group understands *urf* daily, as seen by their words and deeds (Anhari, 2008, p. 110). The *Punggahan* tradition and *urf* are examples of community practices that persist and are implemented daily. Both came in norms that must be followed (Ramadhani & Abdoeh, 2020).

The Javanese custom of *Punggahan* is typically observed in the month of *Ruwah*, as the idea is to go up with the spirit or return to where it came from. The community's celebration of *Punggahan* is an attempt to usher in Ramadan. Wherever there is a significant delight in Ramadan, there is a desire for more piety. The *Punggahan* ritual is a way of thanking Allah for allowing us to meet another month of Ramadan, which Muslims greatly anticipate, and it has grown across Javanese society (Faizal, 2014).

That is why its followers—especially those in Indonesia—consider Ramadan a significant period. As people from different regions, including towns and villages, celebrate the start of Ramadan, it is typically a highly active time filled with various festivities and traditions. Thus, it is true that there are a wide variety of celebrations to usher in the month of Ramadan. Even while the celebrations vary, they always follow the same general format and intent as a way for Muslims to express their gratitude for the eagerly anticipated month of Ramadan that finally arrives. As a gift from Allah, the start of Ramadan raises awareness of the importance of preserving and enhancing interpersonal bonds so that they endure forever (Sari & Darmalaksana, 2022).

In contrast to the *Punggahan* tradition, the Javanese community in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, practises *Punggahan* differently. As a result

of the *Punggahan* tradition, traditional foods such as *apem*, *bananas*, sticky rice, *pasung*, and many others are necessary in the ritual. These foods have symbolic meanings since, at their core, people are fallible and want forgiveness from one another with the goal of a person being more composed and committed to their fast. Nevertheless, the Javanese community's *Punggahan* in the Besitang District is distinct since no particular obligated feast menu is to be brought when performing the *Punggahan*. This research is important as the customs that Javanese people often follow when the month of Ramadan approaches differ from the *Punggahan* customs. Researchers must, therefore, begin by addressing the first problem formulation: What is the history behind the emergence of the Javanese community's *Punggahan* tradition in North Sumatra? They observe that the *Punggahan* tradition practiced by the Javanese community in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, has a different implementation. Second, what does the *Punggahan* ritual of the Javanese population in North Sumatra mean when they welcome Ramadan?

This paper aimed to investigate the implementation technique of the *Punggahan* tradition observed to greet Ramadan by the Javanese community in Sekoci Village, Besitang District. In addition, to ascertain why the *Punggahan* custom practised by the Javanese community in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, differs from the *Punggahan* custom generally, which necessitates the bringing of menu items such *apem*, sticky rice, bananas, and *pasung*.

This study applied qualitative inquiry by using key instruments held by the researcher to investigate an object, also known as qualitative research. Qualitative data are information or phrases rather than symbols or numbers (Sugiyono, 2005). A literature review and interview analysis were used to gather qualitative data (Ali, 2023a). Interviews were employed in this study to get the necessary data from informants connected to this tradition. In the meantime, gathering data through literature reviews aims to provide additional insight into the *Punggahan* customs that different Javanese communities have to celebrate at the beginning of Ramadan.

The historical research method was employed in this study. This approach seeks to characterize and investigate a distinctive custom among the North Sumatra Javanese community. As a result, this technique was employed to facilitate researchers' description of the *Punggahan* custom of the Javanese population in Langkat Regency to celebrate Ramadan. Daliman defines the historical method as a methodical framework of guidelines intended to help academics gather relevant historical sources for written research presentations.

Researchers must complete specific steps in historical research, such as the data collection phase. The primary step in writing for researchers is gathering as much information as possible to facilitate the compilation of studies on the *Punggahan* tradition. The primary and secondary data that were required were gathered in the beginning. Researchers mostly employ oral sources from community interviews and Malay cultural activists as additional support for the author's findings. In addition, several scientific publications, including books and journal articles, that describe the *Punggahan* tradition were used as secondary data in this study. It provides the author with additional secondary and supporting sources while they researched the *Punggahan* tradition of the Javanese community in Langkat Regency in preparation for Ramadan.

The author validated the data following the heuristic/data-gathering phase. At this point, the author carefully examined the sources used for the study to ensure that the information used came from reliable sources. During this phase, the investigator conducted internal and external assessments. Assessing the data's veracity by physical component inspection is the aim of external criticism. The researchers also criticized the usage of non-standard language in the data. Additionally, to ensure that the data utilized in this research is reliable and accurate, the author conducts internal critique by comprehending the writing's content and comparing it with other data.

The interpretation of the collected data is the third step. To ensure that the data used is consistent with the intended data, the author now interprets data that has passed the source critique step. Data interpretation and analysis



aim to provide an explanation that aligns with historical facts. The author's first stage is to explain the historical facts gathered; the author must compile these historical data. This step was taken to facilitate research acquisition of information regarding the *Punggahan* tradition of the Javanese people in Langkat Regency for the celebration of Ramadan.

The stage of historiography was the last step in this investigation. It was where the author gathered and wrote the report using the scientific writing research framework. To make the study conducted—specifically, the *Punggahan* practice of the Javanese population in Langkat Regency in celebrating Ramadan—easy to read and comprehend for readers. It is to ensure that the research complies with established protocols. The author uses a methodical approach when researching and writing about history, particularly regarding the Javanese custom of commemorating Ramadan in Langkat Regency (Abdurrahman, 2011).

### The Development of the *Punggahan* Tradition

The majority of Indonesians identify as Muslims. The predominant religion of Islam has strong ties to the indigenous way of life. Its supporters' fervor is the reason for this bond. Islam will, therefore, constantly be discussed and brought up in conversation with a variety of regional cultures. Islam did not emerge in a culturally barren period or place. The relationship between Islam and local elements in this domain is based on the continuity model, which describes the human qualities inherited from generation to generation and the connections between Islam and local contents across the archipelago.

The two most significant components of society are culture and religion. There is an attraction of interest between a communal group and religion. In a similar vein, Islam exists inside a community with long-standing traditions and culture, necessitating their mutual assimilation. Due to society's cultural and religious fusion process, religion must adjust to the local community's customs (Ali, 2023b). As in the case of Sunan Kalijaga's wayang kulit sermons. *Wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) was a Javanese custom before the

coming of Islam. However, after Sunan Kalijaga used *wayang* media to preach, people gradually began to accept Sunan Kalijaga's Islamic da'wah. It is because, following Islamic beliefs, Sunan Kalijaga altered the story's substance without altering the container or *wayang*.

How Muslim communities came to be in Java is a subject of very little knowledge. The history of Islam in Java is mysterious because there aren't many trustworthy historical documents about the beginnings and development of Islam in Southeast Asia. In reference to Damais and Robson, Woodward asserts that there was a Muslim presence in Java during Majapahit's reign at the end of the fourteenth century. Slowly, Javanese Hindus gradually shifted to Islam. Ricklefs discovered proof of this community of Muslim converts in the Trawulan cemetery, dating from 1368 to 1369 AD, supporting this claim. Remember that Islam would initially acquire followers along the north shore, a hub for traders who conduct business in the Indian Ocean, even if the earliest evidence originated from the interior, close to the palace. Conclusions on Islam's dominance of political and religious life in central Java are challenging. The north and east coasts of Java, where immigrant Muslim communities were founded, were thus the locations of the earliest Islamic states.

During the nineteenth century in particular, the blending of Javanese and Islamic traditions emerged as the predominant form of religion in Java. Ricklefs often uses the term "mystical synthesis". Years of struggle and compromise culminated in this mystical synthesis, which never became an accepted doctrine that the courts could uphold. The synopsis addresses how local Islam influences social and religious structures and how Islamic doctrine is understood locally. Based on the interpretation of elements of recognized traditions and local cultural and religious knowledge, these religious and social systems employ a narrow range of concepts (Fauzi, 2012).

Culture and religion are closely related. It is impossible to separate the two from one another. Some claim, however, that cultural religions are referred to as *arḍi* (earth) religions, while divine religions—such as Islam,

Judaism, and Christianity—are the products of culture. Islam is not a religion that developed from a civilization as a result. It is because Islam emerges and flourishes in a community that is diverse in its cultural makeup. In order for Islam to eventually assimilate into a society's existing culture (Marzuki, 2014, p. 219).

Islam introduces a new culture into society, which becomes recognized as Islamic culture over time rather than being a byproduct of the culture that preexists in the neighborhood. Acculturation and cultural assimilation constitute the process of creation. This culture results from Islam's integration and acculturation with the surrounding communities' cultures, including *punggahan*, *meugang*, *sadranan*, and others (Marzuki, 2014).

It is not simple to forge a shared identity in a multicultural community. Although Java is home to many different tribes, it appears that defining this identity requires some struggle. At the transnational, national, subnational, or ethnic levels, identity creation is always necessary. Dialectical and discursive processes are necessary to create an identity full of personal and collective meaning and purpose. It indicates that until a consensus-based group identity is established, the identity-construction process will involve claims and counterclaims, or thesis and antithesis, on an ongoing basis. While there are many ways for anthropologists to study traditional Islam in Javanese society, a lot of research focuses on integrating Javanese identity, particularly regarding traditions like the *Punggahan* customs practiced outside of Java. Dhofier identifies traditional Islam as a concept associated with ulama that originated in the early years of Islamic law and theology formation. But, there are dynamics in constructing identity alongside modernity and globalization (Fauzi, 2012).

The *Punggahan* ritual was introduced to North Sumatra because the colonial authority developed strategy intended to spread throughout the colonized provinces. Aside from that, when colonialism arrived in the archipelago at the start of the 17th century, it made an effort to use the colonial lands by clearing forests and planting oil palm plantations in their place. As a result, the administration of the Dutch East Indies needed

laborers. As a result, the colonial authority imported laborers from Java. The Dutch East Indies administration employed a system that paid workers imported from Java and permitted them to settle on property where they would eventually construct homes. Naturally, laborers who continue to follow Javanese customs are employed by Javanese communities in Sumatra, including *Punggahan*.

*Punggahan* derives its etymology from *mungguh*, a Javanese word. *Punggahan*, loosely translated, is an endeavor to pay respect to ancestors before Ramadan. It implies that the ancestors who have passed on will have their souls raised. Therefore, if it has anything to do with now, it has to do with praying to the ancestors. In addition, the goal of this tradition is for the following generation to carry on it in line with relevant principles. Praying to deceased ancestors is a way of worship in the *Punggahan* tradition, which is an expression of thanksgiving to God for the favors bestowed. Prayers sent to ancestors would help them add to their good deeds or be accepted by Allah, according to tradition.

Muslims gather in any place throughout Ramadan, celebrating the start of the month with different and distinctive customs. Muslims have to observe a month-long fast during the month of Ramadan. Since they can still enjoy and fully participate in the month-long festival granted by Allah, Muslims greet Ramadan with delight and gratitude. *Punggahan*, the celebration of its arrival, is a custom often observed a few days before Ramadan. The traditional way that Sundanese people celebrate *Punggahan* is by gathering together and sharing food, or *botram* as it is known there. It usually happens while travelling or at their parents' house.

Every region observes the pre-Ramadan traditions differently, culminating in the arrival of the holy month. In Indonesian culture, getting together with family, friends, and relatives is customary for celebrating the *Punggahan* tradition. This *mungguh* custom persists, even in towns or cities. This occasion is always noticed, especially in Tatar Sunda, West Java. In the *Punggahan* custom, Muslims greet the holy month of Ramadan full of excitement. Muslims welcome the holy month of Ramadan with great

enthusiasm and happiness, as it is an occasion that comes around just once a year, and there are more blessings in worshipping during Ramadan than during other months. *Punggahan* customs are practiced in many ways, including family get-togethers, dining, praying, forgiving one another, embarking on pilgrimages, expressing thanks, travelling, and performing *Punggahan* alms.

The *Punggahan* custom has been ingrained in the community, leading to its continued preservation. People can show their happiness at the start of Ramadan by participating in this *Punggahan* custom. As a result, this *Punggahan* custom is always followed in the final few days leading up to Ramadan. From a societal standpoint, this *Punggahan* custom serves as both a tradition and a means of fostering harmony in the community by serving as a social media platform for fostering ties between individuals and groups since there are no social classes or borders in place in society to distinguish the *Punggahan* tradition from other forms of expression (Sari & Darmalaksana, 2022).

The Javanese community in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, Langkat Regency, continues to practice the *Punggahan* ritual. In North Sumatra, particularly in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, the Javanese continue to uphold this practice. To prevent the *Punggahan* tradition from disappearing, it must be maintained. As a token of appreciation, the Javanese community in Sekoci Village celebrates the arrival of Ramadan with great enthusiasm, as it means they will be reunited with Ramadan.

Administratively, Sekoci Village is part of Langkat Regency's Besitang District, which borders Aceh Province. In Sekoci Village, plantation laborers and farmers of palm oil make up the majority of the population. Many tribes, including Javanese, Malay, Batak, and others, make up the community of Sekoci Village for cultural acculturation to occur along with implementing the *Punggahan* custom. The *Punggahan* tradition in Sekoci Village is sometimes referred to as "*Meugang*" by some.

The *Punggahan* tradition is practiced in the prayer room or mosque, more precisely on the terrace or porch to facilitate gatherings. In reality, this

custom differs since it does not require carrying a fixed meal to the gathering—such as *apem*, sticky rice, *pasung*, and bananas. In Sidodadi Hamlet, Sekoci Village, the *Punggahan* custom consists mainly of a communal meal procession. Religious leaders will simultaneously offer prayers for their ancestors' spirits before the community's meal (Qudsiyah, 2019, p. 57).

The merging custom, also known as the *Punggahan* tradition in Sekoci Village, originated from blending Malay and Indigenous cultures during its development. Mr. Rasuli informed me that the main difference between *Punggahan* and *Meugang* traditions is that they both celebrate Ramadan. Thus, to absolve oneself of transgressions against the village community by forgiving one another before fasting, it is imperative to celebrate a thanksgiving ceremony with the residents of Sidodadi Hamlet, Sekoci Village (Rasuli, interview, March 20, 2023).

This custom is typically implemented two to three days before the month of Ramadan, during the month of *Ruwah/Sya'ban*. When it was first implemented, it resembled the *Punggahan* tradition, emphasizing the need to purify oneself by forgiving the people around to observe the fast with peace of mind. In addition, people pray that He may grant their forefathers a pleasant spot at His side. According to Mr. Khairul, Allah expunges all records of human deeds during Sha'ban and replaces them with fresh ones. For Muslims to fast and be absolved of their sins, they must pray and ask Allah to forgive them of all their transgressions (Khairul, interview, March 20, 2023).

The kind of food that the community brings is another development. Mr Ngadiran claims that the *Punggahan* custom has evolved, with the community now bringing a variety of menus that do not require menu items like bananas, *apem*, sticky rice, and *pasung*. Instead, processed menus with ingredients are brought simple meat. However, if they cannot afford it, people typically substitute other processed meals like fish and eggs and processed meat on menus. Accordingly, the event had no obligatory menu (Ngadiran, interview, April 2, 2023).

### The *Punggahan* Tradition in Langkat Regency

In terms of terminology, religion is comparable to the Arabic word “*din*,” which refers to a way of life governed by laws or customs, and the idea of “religion” in European languages. There is a belief that God is the source of all morality. Observing ritual requirements with great spiritual devotion can also be seen as a religion. As cited by Djamaludin Ancok, Glock and Stark define religion as a system of symbols and ideas, values, and conduct that center on matters deemed most significant. By pointing to the transcendental realm, religion as a system offers precise interpretations and explanations of a wide range of problems, giving the world significance. That is, religion offers meanings and explanations that transcend the confines of reason and human understanding. Additionally, moral rules established by religion restrict and govern the actions of those who follow it. Religious institutions and norms are enforced at a higher level, requiring adherents to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with predetermined standards. Its goal is to lead and guide its followers onto the correct path—one that will bring them to salvation (Usman, 2023).

The modern period has seen the emergence of numerous phenomena, one of which is the difficulty in distinguishing between religion and tradition (culture), which, up until this point, have always been a part of social life in Indonesian society. In this instance, religion is different yet has united into one entity—Islam and Indonesian tradition. Regarding ethnicity, race, religion, cultural diversity, and customs, Indonesia is a multicultural country in and of itself. People worldwide know this diversity since it has been there for a long time. Indonesians’ growth, development, and daily lives will always reflect this cultural diversity.

Indonesia is a cosmopolitan nation with the highest number of Muslim populations, as demonstrated by numerous ethnic groups with distinct customs and cultures, such as the Javanese. An ethnic group called the Javanese people reside on the island of Java (Central Java, East Java, DI Yogyakarta). Nevertheless, along the way, many Javanese people moved to other parts of Indonesia, such as North Sumatra.

*Punggahan*, from a philosophical perspective, was formerly a relationship between the elite and lower classes. Living in their homeland, *Hinggil* people are either first or second-generation descendants. *Handap* inhabitants, on the other hand, are foreign-born children or younger siblings. The authenticity of *Hinggil*'s ancestral culture, which is intimately connected to and capable of communicating with God and spirits, is highly preserved by its citizens. Locals in Handap develop politics, society, and the economy. The *Hinggil* people mediate between the *Handap* residents and God and the spirits of their ancestors, while the former are thought to be incapable of doing so directly. Then, the people think that the month of Sha'ban is when the ghosts of their ancestors get together. *Ruwah*, which translates to "spirit as a guide," is a common name for the month of *Sha'ban*. Every time the event is carried out, prayers are articulated together for the spirits of departed family members or ancestors. For the people of *Hinggil* and *Handap*, coming together at this time is revered.

The *Punggahan* custom was then changed into a ceremony to celebrate the start of Ramadan when Islam reached the Sundanese tribe. Naturally, the upload is now changing again in response to the circumstances. *Punggahan* is even utilized as a set of social service activities in the contemporary iteration. The *Punggahan* custom is associated with the month of Sha'ban, which is given precedence. The hadith explained unique aspects of the month of Sha'ban. Then, Allah pardons the sins of His creation during this month. The community still follows the *Punggahan* ritual to greet the holy month of Ramadan because they recognize the significance of the month of Sha'ban this month (Sari & Darmalaksana, 2022).

*Meugang* is another name for the Javanese customs practiced in Sekoci Village, Besitang District. The goal of this custom is to greet the month of Ramadan joyfully. Families, particularly parents, are encouraged to get together for this event. During the celebration, every child and relative who lives abroad will come home to be with their family. In the festivities of *Meugang* and *Punggahan*, as previously mentioned. How the Javanese community in Sekoci Village celebrates the start of Ramadan deviates from



the *Punggahan* custom. Here, the distinction is found in the food attendees bring to the mosque or prayer room when congregating. They bring prepared meat dishes such as stew, soup, and *rendang* (Marzuki, 2014). Religious leaders pray that the ancestors will ascend to heaven without incident before they begin the communal feast (Qudsiyah, 2019).

People practice the *Punggahan* ritual as a way to forgive one another or to develop interpersonal bonds. In actuality, the purpose of the *meugang* or *Punggahan* ritual is to allow individuals to forgive and maintain relationships with one another to enable people to fast specifically and without harboring grudges when the month of Ramadan arrives. In addition, sending prayers to deceased ancestors, hoping Allah will accept the prayers and ease their difficulties, is another meaning of *Punggahan* or merging.

Islamic law does not recognize the *Punggahan* tradition, and the Prophet himself did not practice it. However, there are several lessons to learn from this custom, including the need to forgive one another and purge one's soul of transgressions to greet the holy and grace-filled month of Ramadan. Since Sunan Kalijaga was the one who initially brought the *Punggahan* tradition, society, particularly those in Java, significantly recognizes its existence (Ramadhani & Abdoeh, 2020).

The ulama holds that Islamic teachings encourage people to follow the customs and behaviors of each culture. Culture is abstract and originates in the ideas and thoughts generated by the human mind. It is apparent in the products of human intellect, which take the shape of culture that evolves and blends with religion to become what is eventually called the Islamic tradition. However, Islam and culture are incompatible; they can only coexist harmoniously, as demonstrated by the *Punggahan* tradition, which offers guidance on coexisting peacefully (Abdillah, 2011).

According to Mulyana (1996), the *Punggahan* tradition is a Javanese community custom that has numerous positive effects on society. For example, it helps people forgive one another and improve their bonds with family, friends, and neighbors. It prepares them to begin worshipping when

they observe the fast—observing Ramadan and expressing gratitude to Allah Swt for granting them the chance to fast (Hidayat, 2009). This custom serves as a tool for people to reflect on their past transgressions and errors so that, as Ramadan approaches, everyone can accept responsibility for their actions and provide forgiveness to friends, family, and neighbors.

*Punggahan* is an expression of giving to others and thankfulness, according to what Mr. Rasuli remarked. In addition, each child owes their parents a duty of filial piety, which includes saying prayers for them in the event of their parents' passing and offering an apology if they are still living. As a result, to find serenity during a fast, one must have a pure heart by expressing regret to other people (Rasuli, interview, April 2, 2023).

Mr. Ahmad claims that *Punggahan* is supposed to pray for the ancestors' spirits, which symbolizes obedience, even though *birr al-wālidayn* is no longer present. Giving charity, thanking God, and reading prayers written by religious leaders are all part of the *Punggahan* practice of devotion. Religious leaders typically recite *tahlil*, *taḥmīd*, and *taḥkīm* (Ahmad, interview, March 20, 2023).

Through an interview with Mr. Zul Effendi in Sidodadi Hamlet, it was discovered that the Javanese *Punggahan* tradition in the Langkat area had been held for a long time in Sekoci Village. The event aims to show gratitude to Allah and forge friendships between people before Ramadan because we reconnected throughout the month of Ramadan. According to Mr. Zul Effendi, who conducted the interview, the food brought for *Punggahan* has a symbolic meaning to cleanse one's heart (Effendi, interview, March 21, 2023).

After considering the statements above, the researcher concluded that the *Punggahan* tradition is a way for children to demonstrate their filial piety even after their parents passed away by chanting prayers aloud during the practice of the *Punggahan* and believing that only God is the object of worship. Another purpose is to preserve peace and a feeling of unity within society, as well as a humanitarian deed for other people.

Every believer of Allah is obligated to fast throughout Ramadan; the fundamental purpose of the *Punggahan* custom is to prepare oneself to

become a saleh person by giving to others. Accordingly, before breaking their fast throughout Ramadan, individuals from different Indonesian tribes typically celebrate the month with unique rituals (Amru, 2018). Accordingly, the Malay and Javanese communities' Islamic customs regarding the celebration of Ramadan are comparable to those of Sekoci Village, Besitang District. The absorption and acculturation of Javanese culture in Tanah Melayu is the reason behind this. Thus, the Javanese *Punggahan* tradition gave rise to this custom. As such, there are numerous advantages and more profound significance associated with this custom. For the benefit of future generations, societies must preserve their traditions to preserve their cultural heritage.

## Conclusion

Workers who migrated from Java during the colonial era are credited with introducing the *Punggahan* culture to Sekoci Village, Besitang District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province. Then, the laborers who were brought in from Java continued to follow or closely observe the customs they brought with them. In Sekoci Village, Javanese people are still observant of and involved in the *Punggahan* ritual. However, unlike *Punggahan* in general, which demands specific menu items like bananas, *apem*, sticky rice, and *pasung*, the *Punggahan* tradition practiced by the Javanese community in Sekoci Village has changed in its application. It now resembles the *meugang* tradition with Malay customs. Therefore, Malay society and Javanese customs in Sekoci Village, Besitang District, have undergone assimilation and even cultural acculturation. The meal menu supplied for the implementation, which is predominately made up of meat dishes and does not call for menu items such as bananas, *apem*, sticky rice, *pasung*, and so forth, is indicative of this.[w]

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