



Rituals of Paddy Sustainability in Karawang Regency

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ABSTRACT

Karawang Regency is known as the “paddy granary” of West Java, contributing to national rice self-sufficiency. The existence of Karawang Regency as a “paddy granary” was threatened by the development of the industrial sector and the growth of settlements, which led to the conversion of paddy fields. This study seeks to reveal the role of traditional ceremonies in the sustainability of paddy cultivation in Karawang Regency. The rituals of *Nyalin*, *Hajat Bumi*, *Nganyaran*, and *Babaritan* are traditions that are still being preserved. The rituals are part of the honoring of Dewi Sri. This study employs a qualitative approach. The data was collected through observation, interviews, and literature study. The function of traditional ceremonies is not only to preserve tradition but also to maintain the productivity of paddy cultivation. Traditional ceremonies continue to exist despite the passage of time. In the digital era, the values of mutual assistance and environmental preservation contained in these traditional ceremonies have become important local knowledge and socio-cultural capital for national development.

Keywords: *Function of traditional ceremonies, Paddy sustainability, Rituals.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The global food crisis is one of the most immediate issues confronting sustainable development today. The world’s population is rapidly increasing, necessitating an appropriate food supply. Each country must be able to keep its food supply stable to prevent the threat of starvation that will afflict its people. When food output falls, it undoubtedly impacts the community’s social, economic, and political difficulties. This will eventually threaten world security (Mudrieq, 2014). On the other hand, the OECD-FAO research (2010) demonstrates that, while the world is currently in crisis, the agricultural sector is relatively resilient, with a significant supply response due to rising food prices and increased demand (Nainggolan, 2011).

The paddy self-sufficiency policy in Indonesia is one of the measures to address global concerns. Under the Suharto regime, Indonesia achieved self-sufficiency in 1984. National paddy production is estimated to be around 27 million tons. However, food security under the New Order’s supervision proved precarious. As the 1990s began, Indonesia tried again to import paddy from other countries. Reliance on rice imports increased to roughly 3 million tons in 1995 (Raditya, 2018). Under the current administration of President Jokowi, the topic of food sovereignty has emerged as one of the most critical

development issues. The cause of the fall in paddy productivity is land ownership inequality (Zuhra, 2017).

Karawang Regency was also experiencing a food crisis. The majority of the converted agricultural land is occupied by industry. Additionally, industrialization fosters the formation of new towns for migrants seeking employment. In the history of the Indonesian economy, the apex of rising national economic growth occurred between 1980 and 1990. The industrial sector became ecstatic due to the surging oil prices on the global market. Due to the favorable investment climate, new factories were developed.

The government has transformed Karawang Regency into Indonesia’s greatest paddy-producing agricultural region. In 1984, Karawang produced 25.8 million tons for internal use and exported goods to Malaysia, Singapore, and Pakistan. This land change threatens Karawang’s status as a “paddy granary” as seen in Figure 1. The paddy surplus is not as large as it was in the 1980s. In Karawang, there were still 12,1 million hectares of rice fields in 1981 and 2.4 million hectares in 2000 (Aditya, 2020).

The Karawang Regency is today the largest industrial city in Indonesia. Formerly referred to as paddy barn. Farmers were replaced by manufacturing employees, small business owners, and coolies. Few individuals



Figure 1 A paddy field in Karawang Regency. At this time, the area of the paddy fields has decreased.

opted to survive as farmers. It is easy to see changes in tangible culture, for example, the constriction of agricultural land. However, it is harder to observe changes in the community's cultural values as an intangible culture.

The image of the Karawang Regency as the national rice barn remains until now. Sustainable agriculture practices and rituals in the lives of the agricultural cycle still exist. Among them are rites of *Nyalin*, *Babarit*, and *Hajat Bumi* can still operate in various locations.

The Karawang Regency Government has produced the *Pokok Pikiran Kebudayaan Daerah Kabupaten Karawang 2018* (Regional Cultural Thoughts of Karawang Regency 2018), which comprises a variety of natural conditions of objects for the advancement of culture, as well as challenges and answers to those difficulties. The PPKD is a road map for the advancement of culture in the Karawang Regency through culture's development, utilization, and encouragement.

This study examines the rituals related to paddy in the Karawang Regency in the context of a transitional society. Paddy in the culture of Indonesian people is continually respected. Indonesian culture does not see rice only as satisfying bodily functions but instead sees in the essence how such a type of plant means in human life and can even prosper humanity (Adriati, 2001).

Humans respect and value paddy tremendously since it is essential to their survival. Many efforts were made to achieve agricultural prosperity. Everything on rice is performed with reverence, obedience, and dedication (Hartati, 2012). Paddy has strategic value and is thus considered the manifestation of Dewi Sri Pohaci, a rice fertility symbol. She is also known as Dewi Sri or Nyi Sri Pohaci in the northern part of West Java. However, something is known as Nyi Pwah Aci (Suganda, 2006).

Some Javanese people believe in the rural myth "Dewi Sri". There is already a conventional representation of his habitat in previous societies. That traditional vision is the image humans have of the nature of the environment's life, its influence and reaction on



Figure 2 Paddy husk as red brick filler in the Temple of Jiwa building structure at the Batujaya site.

humans, and activities (Dewi, Supriyadi, & Dasuki, 2018).

Paddy plants in Karawang have been known since ancient times. The discovery of paddy husks as filler for red bricks in the structure of the Candi Jiwa (Buddhist Temple), in the Batujaya Temple Complex as seen in Figure 2, shows that paddy has existed since the time of the Tarumanagara Kingdom (4th – 7th century AD) with a Hindu pattern. The location of the site is a paddy field area, near settlement areas, and not far from the northern coastline of West Java (end of Karawang) (Astuti, 2007).

The ceremony's mention of glorifying the Goddess of Paddy has a local characteristic. In Karawang and areas influenced by Sundanese culture, it is known as the ritual of *nyalin*, *babarit*, *hajat bumi*, *seren taun*, *mapag sri*, or *sedekah bumi*. In some areas in Indonesia, it is known as *ala baloe* in the Alor community (Langkameng, 2015), *ngarantika* in the Dayak community (Astri, Noor, & Khosmas, 2020), *bira mahihawu* in Halmahera (Regel, Matheosz, & Deeng, 2019), *selamet* or *sedekah* in the Sasak community in Lombok (Saharudin, 2021), rice harvesting *wiwit* in the Javanese community in Mojokerto (Susanti, 2018). Therefore, the challenges of maintaining rituals in some of these areas are very likely to vary, considering their locality.

Publications related to paddy rituals in Karawang Regency have been written previously, including Nurfutriani (2012); Agustina, Helena, and Pratiwi (2018); Ramadhani and Nisa (2020); Chofyan, Rustan, and Hariyanto (2016); Amrullah (2019); and Widiatmoko (2021).

Some of the writings above are still fragmentary works and discuss one side of the paddy ritual in Karawang. This paper wants to see some of the rituals that are still developing. The novelty of this paper lies in its attempt to place it in the context of a cultural preservation strategy in Karawang.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology based on a descriptive analysis. The data collection methods include interviews, observations, and literature reviews. Observations were carried out in Rengasdengklok and Cikampek. The purpose of the observation focuses on the implementation of the paddy ritual. In Karawang Regency, interviews were conducted with five cultural activists. The selection of informants is based on their role in cultural preservation. In addition, analysis of concrete documentation is employed. Through the analysis of actual documentation, the classified data is then confirmed to the community to what extent the existence and evolution of the paddy ritual can be observed in terms of social categories and functions.

The datasets were then analyzed qualitatively. Essentially, qualitative analysis is the process of determining what the data means by simultaneously reducing the amount of data, presenting the data, and conclusions drawing or verification (Miles & Huberman, 1992).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Paddy's Ritual Descriptions in Karawang

3.1.1. Ritual of Nyalin

The *nyalin* ceremony is a series of agricultural rituals that Karawang peasants still hold. *Nyalin* is derived from the term *salin*, which means to substitute. This ceremony is performed when the plants are about to be harvested and replaced by new ones. This ceremony is performed on an individual basis once a year. The *Nyalin* ceremony occurs between the hours of 16.00 and 17.00 western Indonesian time. The place is the area plant to be harvested. The ceremonial tools prepared include *dawegan*, incense, *lisong/cigar*, *rurujakan*, light meals (*rangginang*, *opak*, *wajit*, etc.), *sanggar* (a place to store offerings made of bamboo), white cloth, *hoar* leaves, *kawung* leaf, *kanyere* leaf, *caruluk*, sugar cane tree, *ketupat*, *leupeut*, *tantangin*.

Sanggar made of bamboo is first decorated with *kawung* leaf, *kanyere* leaf, *hoar* leaf, and *caruluk* (*kawung* fruit) which are brought to the ceremony site. *Sanggar* is filled with offerings such as *rurujakan*, light meals, *ketupat*, *tantangin*, and *leupeut* covered with a white cloth. Furthermore, *sanggar* is stored on the edge of the area to be harvested. *Sugarcane* trees are placed on either side of *sanggar*. Meanwhile, the censer, cigar, and *dawegan* are kept under *sanggar*.

First, the owner of the intention or *guguni* dons a headband and all-white attire. He burnt incense while reciting the schematics. He uses *etem (ani-ani)* to pluck

five paddy stalks while holding his breath (choose paddy stalks with good seeds). It is termed *indung padi* when five rice stalks are bound with white cloth and the leaves are braided (chopped). After a sufficient number of bonds have been calculated, the paddy is immediately brought home and kept on a *bale* (table). This method is known as *dicalikkeun*. In addition, the paddy is preserved in a preset location and will be seeded with other paddy seeds a year later.

3.1.2. Ritual of Nganyaran

Nganyaran is derived from the *anyar* word, which means new. This ceremony is performed once the harvest has been completed. The organizers are independent persons. The purpose of the *Nganyaran* ceremony is to unite Dewi Sri with the bountiful crop. Typically, this ceremony is held on the third, fifth, and seventh days following the harvest. Its execution is situation- and circumstance-specific. The ritual location is *pandaringan* or *goah*, a paddy storage room. Adapted to the eating patterns of the farming family that hosted the *Nganyaran* event, the time of implementation is around 16.00-17.00 western Indonesian time.

Ingredients prepared for the *Nganyaran* ceremony, namely red chili, salt, shrimp paste, roasted red bottom, *dawegan*, *nasi congcol*, *bakakak*, cork fish, catfish, grilled eel, *kue bugis*, red pancake, white pancake, red porridge or white, *ambon* banana, *ketupat*, *darigin*, *leupeut*, sweet coffee, bitter coffee, sweet tea, bitter tea, water, and incense. At 16.00 western Indonesian time, the prepared offerings are brought into the *pandaringan* and neatly stored. Someone with intent, also known as *guguni*, enters the *goah* by burning incense and reading the *rajahs*. After reciting the *rajah*, the *rice congcol*, *bakakak*, and fruit offerings are brought out and consumed collectively. After the ritual, any leftover rice is returned to the *leuit* or other designated location. The rice is then kept for forty days. Only then is it usable.

3.1.3. Ritual of Hajat Bumi

Hajat Bumi is an annual event to celebrate the planting season's beginning. This ceremony is also known as *Selamatan Bumi* (Warliyah & Wahyudin, 2011). This rite is both an expression of thankfulness to God and a celebration of the return of the planting season. At the same time, he prayed to the Almighty for blessings and excellent results for his farming. *Hajat Bumi* rituals are performed at crossroads or sacred sites. To select the implementation date, the local's leader convened a meeting to appoint a committee and develop a budget. Once a budget is available, the implementation date will be set. But first, await input on the *buhun* estimates from the *guguni* or other traditional leaders. The outcomes are communicated to the public.



Figure 3 The Ritual of *Babarit* preserves agricultural traditions and maintains food security.

At 3.00 p.m., people brought a variety of meals, including *tumpeng* rice, *uduk*, and others, according to their ability. The ceremony started with greetings and instructions from community officials. The ceremony begins with a vow and concludes with a prayer. *Bubuni* manages the placement of tools. After the prayer, a shared portion of the meal is consumed. After the event, the scapegoat is sacrificed, and its head is buried in a holy location. The committee provides the meat that is served during nightly entertainment events each day.

3.1.4. Ritual of *Babarit*

The community typically holds *Babarit* or *Babaritan* as a sign of gratitude for their blessings in the form of successful harvests, village safety, and the gift of enough food and drink as seen in Figure 3. This has become an annual tradition. The implementation is nearly identical to *Hajat Bumi*. It is merely that *Babarit* is being implemented in the Karawang area, involving one or more people. The practices resemble a prayer ritual at a sacred location.

Around 10.00 to 11.00 western Indonesian time, *kohkol* (*kentongan*) is sounded. The goal is to remind residents about the *babarit* ceremony in the afternoon. Prepared tree ceremony tools: incense, *tumpeng* rice, *bakakak*, *dawegan*, *rujukan*, fruits (apples, grapes, oranges, etc.), red pulp, white pulp, sugar cane, stalk rice, young coconut, *plawija* fruits, incense sticks, and white cloth.

3.1.5. Tradition of *Kalagumarang*

Kalagumarang ritual is the tradition of destroying rats in rice fields collectively before peasants cultivate their fields for planting or harvesting. This practice has existed since 1980 and continues until the present day. *Kalagumarang* is inextricably linked to the legend of Dewi Sri. *Kalagumarang* is a nuisance animal in the growth of paddies, such as rodents, weeds, and forest cows. Paddy is a representation of Dewi Sri.

Consequently, *kalagumarang* must be eradicated (Mewangi, 2021).

Rat reproduction is extremely rapid during the *gadu* or dry season. If not eradicated immediately, rats will consume rice plants that are ready for harvest. The involved farmers have their responsibilities. Some put water from a hose into the dividing wall of the ground irrigation canal; others caressed the rats that emerged; still, others caught rats.

The execution of the *kalagumarang* ritual with simple tools, such as a tree branch, bamboo stick, long hose, and water pump. In addition to pumping water, some also smoke the holes where rats live. The farmers vigorously hit the rats in the channel. Hundreds of rats can be exterminated within 1-2 hours. The dead rats were collected in sacks. It is claimed that the *kalagumarang* practice is more effective than placing rat poison in the corners of rice fields or employing chemicals.

Paddy rituals represent cultural value, defines as the concepts that exist in the minds of citizens regarding what they deem to be of high regard (Koentjaraningrat, 2000). The cultural values that should be preserved are religious which can be seen in a strong belief in something intangible. The value of solidarity can be seen is shown by citizens' involvement regardless of age, gender, occupation, and even beliefs. The consistency of performing rituals without waiting for assistance from the government shows self-reliance. The implementation of practices using natural resources related the environment sustainability.

3.2. Change and Continuity of Paddy's Ritual

Some interesting findings can be analyzed related to the sustainability of rice rituals. Some are still running in the old way, but some have made adjustments. The adaptation strategy is carried out so that the rice ritual can still be held.

The *Nyalin* ritual was last practiced in Karawang in 2019. Its name has now been changed to "*nyisihan*," along with changes in the process of implementing *Nyalin* and the materials used (Interview with Respondent E, Karawang, July 29, 2022). The process is done not publicly, limited, and individuals in their respective houses. People can still see the incense burning in front of the house, along with a young coconut as an offering. In contrast to the former *Nyalin*, which supplied a lot of food and did communally.

The name change from "*nyalin*" to "*nyisihan*" was made to adjust to current conditions. Tradition remains but is not considered to violate religious (Islamic) rules. The *Nyalin* procession, with offerings of grilled incense and various types of food to be offered to Dewi Sri, became the main factor triggering this change. At the time, the *Nyisihan* tradition no longer includes offering

food, because it becomes useless and a waste of food (Interview with Respondent E, Karawang, August 5, 2022).

The conflict between tradition and religious perception is one of the crucial issues of cultural preservation. Efforts to find compromises are made so that the tradition remains sustainable. Setiawan's research (Setiawan, 2020) shows an adjustment from *ruwat laut* to *syukuran laut* in South Lampung. The ritual of *melarung* a buffalo's head is replaced with activities more aligned with religious teachings.

Regarding rituals, society strikes a balance. Rituals continue to be performed in the form of genuine, but their significance or worth changes. Rituals are not focused solely on ancestors or calling for loyalty to forebears; rather, they are directed towards Islam's principles by invoking Allah SWT.

Changes also occur in the *Kalagumarang* ritual. In ancient times, this tradition was carried out on the instructions of the village head or local community leaders (*sesepuh*). At present, the *Kalagumarang* tradition is carried out privately without any instructions from the local leader. Each farmer or cultivator carries out the *Kalagumarang* tradition according to his wishes and is carried out by himself accompanied by several people who become farmers in his fields (Interview with Respondent E, Karawang, August 5, 2022).

The changes that occurred in the two paddy ritual processions, showed a decline. At first, as a large event attended by many people, it became a personal event and only involved a few people. There is also no requirement or instruction from the local leadership. Traditions are carried out to their wishes which are carried out thoroughly.

The existence of the sacred tomb of Ki Bagus Jabin as seen in Figure 4, associated with *Babarit* rituals helps to preserve cultural values in society. If community members have a *kaul* (promise) for a specific purpose, they bring food to the grave to be prayed for. After that, the food is consumed together. Likewise, some still wish to make their rice fields more fertile, making *rurujakan* stored in the four corners of the rice field (Interview with Respondent M, Karawang, August 4, 2022).

The *Babarit* tradition is developing. Practiced in the past was only practiced among farmers, but at the moment is also practiced by other professions, such as traders, businesspeople, and other professionals who seek blessings in all their endeavors. As a result of the difficult life, the *Babarit* ritual has developed into communal rituals of diverse livelihoods (Interview with Respondent R, Karawang, August 5, 2022).

The continuity of the paddy ritual today has the hope of being sustainable. Rituals are divided into two categories: traditions and cultural performances. When



Figure 4 The tomb of Ki Bagus Jabin, which is the cultural orientation of the community.

the paddy ritual as a tradition is lost, the preservation can be maintained as a cultural ritual, for the collective knowledge and memory needs of the supporting community.

From the physical aspect, the recommendation for its preservation is to compile a database and ritual guidelines and create a forum to improve the quality of human resources for ritual activists. In the long term, it is hoped that the ritual will become part of the Karawang tourist attraction. Preservation of rice rituals requires a commitment from cultural stakeholders.

Paddy rituals can maintain food security in Karawang Regency. During the pandemic, the industrial sector experienced a shock, which resulted in layoffs. Despite the pandemic, the agriculture sector has survived. Paddy cultivation, supported by a rural culture ingrained in the lives of peasant communities, has promising prospects, particularly in the post-pandemic phase.

4. CONCLUSION

Rituals of *Nyalin*, *Nganyaran*, *Hajat Bumi*, *Kalagumarang* are still sustainable. The paddy rituals that aimed to glorify Dewi Sri as a bearer of fertility are still alive in the agrarian tradition of the farming community.

The paddy rituals strengthen the sustainability of paddy production. Not only do they maintain productivity and support environmental sustainability, but there are cultural values that bind farmers to their fields. Planting is not only to provide welfare but as a calling that already exists from down the generations. The paddy ritual has religious values, solidarity, inclusiveness, autonomy, and environmental sustainability. These values are essential to the nation's and state's existence as social capital.

Therefore, there needs to be a conservation roadmap so that the paddy ritual not only survives but can strengthen social cohesion and contribute to the welfare of the supporting community. *Pokok Pikiran Kebudayaan Daerah* (Regional Cultural Thoughts) must be continuously reviewed, not only as a document but as

an ongoing practice. The map of the problem must be shared knowledge. Recommendations for problem-solving must be a shared commitment.

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