

# **Bubur Ase: Betawi Cultural Heritage Food**

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Abstract: Bubur Ase, a Betawi cultural heritage cuisine in Jakarta, Indonesia, is the subject of this research. The study investigates food, culture, and history with elements such as rituals/ceremonies, spices/spice, and stories of Bubur Ase. By analyzing literature, historical records, and conducting interviews with local experts and community members, this study sheds light on the beginnings and development of Bubur Ase. The findings suggest that Betawi culture and customs have been transmitted down through generations to Bubur Ase. The cultural importance of Bubur Ase's key ingredients—rice, coconut milk, and spices—is investigated. Betawi Bubur Ase preparation, cooking, and regional variants are also covered. This research also looks at Bubur Ase's participation in Betawi religious and ceremonial rites, family reunions, and social bonding. Bubur Ase represents warmth, togetherness, and communal harmony, as well as the preservation of cultural history and the building of community identity. The study also demonstrates how Bubur Ase has been impacted by globalization, changing diets, and the decline of traditional cooking techniques. In order to maintain the historical importance of Bubur Ase, the paper discuss es the local communities' culinary festivals, educational initiatives, and public awareness campaigns. By highlighting Bubur Ase's historical, gastronomic, and cultural attributes, this study supports Bubur Ase as a Betawi cultural symbol. The findings highlight the need to raise awareness, support local efforts, and preserve Betawi traditional heritage, particularly Bubur Ase.

Keyword: Ase Porrige, Culture, Betawi, Tradition.

#### 1. Introduction

The Betawi community is known for its diverse cultural influences, combining elements from various ethnic groups such as Javanese, Sundanese, Chinese, Arab, and Portuguese (Erwantoro, 2014; Rohmawati, 2020). The rich and varied culinary traditions of the Betawi people directly result from the mingling of so many different civilizations. The dish Bubur Ase exemplifies the unusual blending of flavors, cooking methods, and cultural influences that characterize Betawi cuisine. Among the Betawi people of Jakarta, Indonesia, Bubur Ase is a culturally significant traditional dish. The Betawi people are the original inhabitants of Jakarta, and they have a rich cultural past that includes distinctive culinary practices. The Betawi tribe's cultural identity and values are reflected in the dish Bubur Ase, which has been passed down through the generations. The Betawi people, who have been making Bubur Ase for millennia, have made it an integral part of their culinary heritage. Lovingly made and eaten at key occasions, religious festivities, and family gatherings, these foods have played a vital role in forging social relationships and fostering a sense of collective identity. In Betawi society, Bubur Ase has come to symbolize the passing down of values and customs from generation to generation.

There are worries regarding the long-term viability of Bubur Ase as a cultural heritage cuisine in the face of rising globalization and fast changes in lifestyles and culinary choices. Appreciating and promoting Bubur Ase is difficult since young people are more drawn to modern and international food, and traditional cooking methods are decreasing. The local community, cultural groups, and government agencies have all taken steps to preserve and share the history of Bubur Ase in the face of this threat. Culinary festivals, educational programs and awareness campaigns have been organized to raise awareness among the Betawi people and the general public about the importance of Bubur "Ase as a cultural treasure. This effort aims to ensure Bubur Ase's appreciation, satisfaction, and transmission to future generations, protecting its place as an important component of Betawi cultural heritage.

Research on Bubur Ase as a Betawi cultural heritage food becomes very important because it is one of the Betawi culinary items that is almost extinct (Krisnadi, 2018). By exploring the historical background, ingredients, method of manufacture, cultural significance, and challenges encountered, this study aims to provide valuable insights on the importance of preserving and promoting Bubur Ase as an integral part of Betawi cultural heritage. The findings from this research can contribute to the development of strategies and initiatives to maintain the cultural identity and heritage values of Bubur, ensuring continuity and sustainable appreciation in the face of modernization and cultural change.

The problem of preserving and promoting Bubur Ase as a Betawi cultural heritage food arises in the context of changing societal dynamics, globalization, and the rapid transformation of culinary practices. This problem can be observed both in urban and rural areas in Jakarta, where the Betawi people live, as well as in other areas where the Betawi diaspora is spreading. The increasing influence of globalization, urbanization, and westernization has

led to shifts in dietary preferences and increased preferences for fast food and international cuisine among the younger generation (Hartanti, 2022). Traditional dishes like Bubur Ase, deeply rooted in local culture and heritage, run the risk of being overshadowed and marginalized by the popularity of modern and international food options.

The fast-paced lifestyle in urban areas often leads to a decline in traditional cooking practices and a reliance on convenience-packed foods. The shift towards fast food and less emphasis on traditional cooking techniques poses challenges for the transmission and preservation of Bubur Ase as a cultural heritage food. Younger generations may migrate to urban areas for education or work, distancing themselves from their cultural roots and traditional culinary practices (Suradi, 2018). As a result, Bubur Ase and other Betawi traditional dishes are in danger of losing their meaning and only being left as memories among the older generation.

It is important to recognize that the context of this problem extends beyond the physical environment. The problem of preserving Ase Porridge as a cultural heritage food is closely related to social, economic and educational factors. It takes the involvement and collaboration of various stakeholders, including the Betawi community, cultural organizations, culinary experts, local governments, and educational institutions, to address challenges and create sustainable strategies for the preservation and promotion of culinary tourism (Untari, 2020).

Understanding the context in which these problems exist allows a comprehensive approach to find solutions. Taking into account socio-cultural dynamics, changing food preferences, and the impact of modernization, interventions can be designed to raise awareness, educate the younger generation, and create a platform for celebration and continuity of Bubur Ase as an invaluable part of Betawi culture.

The urgency of this research consists of several units, including the preservation of cultural heritage, where Bubur Ase is an essential aspect of Betawi cultural heritage. The cultural knowledge, cooking methods, and traditional ingredients linked with Bubur Ase can be preserved via research. This aids in preserving and spreading the Betawi people's intangible cultural heritage. In addition, Bubur Ase might be promoted as part of efforts to bring tourists from other countries to Indonesia to sample authentic local food. We can help promote cultural tourism in Jakarta and other locations inhabited by the Betawi by learning more about the history of Bubur Ase and spreading the word about its significance to the Betawi people. This can stimulate the local economy by creating new sources of revenue and jobs. Understanding the cultural context of Bubur Ase, its traditional components, and the various ways it can be served lays the groundwork for the third category, "culinary innovation and adaptation. "By exploring ways to modernize and present Bubur Ase in a contemporary context without compromising its cultural essence, we can ensure its relevance and appeal to a wider audience. This can contribute to the continuation and continued popularity of Bubur Ase as a cultural heritage food, and the way Bubur Ase is served can be a foundation for culinary innovation and adaptation. By exploring ways to modernize and present Bubur Ase in a contemporary context without compromising its cultural essence, we can ensure its relevance and appeal to a wider audience. This can contribute to the continuation and continued popularity of Bubur Ase as a cultural heritage food, and the way Bubur Ase is served can be a foundation for culinary innovation and adaptation. By exploring ways to modernize and present Bubur Ase in a contemporary context without compromising its cultural essence, we can ensure its relevance and appeal to a wider audience. This can contribute to the continuation and continued popularity of Bubur Ase as a cultural heritage food.

Several issues are intended to be explored concerning Bubur Ase. Firstly, it is the history of the development of Bubur Ase in Betawi culture and how it significantly plays a role as part of the cultural heritage within this community. The second aspect to be examined is the ingredients used and the preparation process of Bubur Ase. How are these ingredients chosen and processed with the traditional techniques inherent to this dish? Subsequently, the issue of the cultural significance of Bubur Ase will become another focus. What is the cultural meaning of Bubur Ase in the context of Betawi society, and how does it function in traditional events, such as weddings or other celebrations, as an essential part of Betawi cultural identity? Lastly, this research will highlight current barriers that obstruct efforts to preserve and promote Bubur Ase as a vital element of Betawi cultural heritage. By delving into these questions, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of Bubur Ase in its historical context, cultural significance, and the challenges faced in its preservation.

#### 2. Methodology

Qualitative methods are research approaches used to deeply understand social phenomena (Denzin et al., 2023). In this research methodology, descriptive method, and qualitative analysis, will be used according to the type of data collected and the research questions asked (Adi, 2021; Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Researchers may utilize this approach to learn about and appreciate Ase porridge from the Betawi people's unique and nuanced viewpoints on its origins, preparation, ingredients, and significance in their daily lives and cultural traditions. Data triangulation techniques can improve the validity and trustworthiness of studies' conclusions.

In qualitative research, the data triangulation methodology uses many data sources, techniques, or theoretical frameworks to corroborate, elaborate, and supplement findings. Data triangulation strengthens the credibility of study conclusions by comparing, merging, or confirming results from several sources (Denzin et al., 2023).

Data triangulation in this research can involve multiple approaches, such as interviewing individuals from the Betawi community who possess knowledge and experience about Ase Porridge, direct observation during the process of Ase Porridge preparation and consumption, as well as historical document analysis, such as books or archives that depict the role of Ase Porridge in Betawi culture. In this research, two expert informants were chosen:

1) Mr. Yahya Adi Putra, an expert in Betawi cultural studies and traditional food historian; and 2), Mr. Lopi, a member of the Betawi community who is also a vendor of Ase Porridge and a native Betawi resident preserving Betawi cuisine. By using data triangulation, the researcher can gain a richer understanding and validate findings about Ase Porridge as a cultural heritage food of the Betawi community.

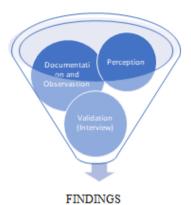


Fig 1. Triangulation of data. Source: Researcher (2023)

In this approach, various types of data sources are utilized to gain a richer and deeper perspective on the research topic. Firstly, interviews with informants who possess relevant knowledge and experience will provide direct insights into the cultural, historical, and inherent values associated with Ase Porridge. Secondly, direct observations during the cooking and presentation process of Ase Porridge will bring forth a practical understanding of the culinary techniques employed, the distinctive ingredients involved, and the traditions of presentation. Lastly, document analysis such as articles, books, or historical records about this food will offer a broader perspective on the development and evolution of Ase Porridge within the context of Betawi culture.

The research methodology will involve data collection from various sources. Data collection can be conducted through surveys, interviews with competent informants in the field of Ase Porridge, focus group discussions with members of the Betawi community, as well as direct observation of the cooking and presentation practices of Ase Porridge. After data collection, the next step is to analyze the collected data. Data analysis may involve qualitative methods. Data analysis will encompass identifying patterns, findings, and themes emerging from the collected data.

#### 3. Results and Discussion

#### **Indonesian Gastronomy**

According to (Soeroso&Turgarini, 2020) in the journal E-Journal of Tourism, they explain that the term "Gastronomy" includes several meanings. Gastronomy includes practical studies in processing food into dishes, theoretical studies that are closely related to food science, as well as technical studies involving the performance and evaluation of food systems. In addition, gastronomy also involves the development of food products, molecular aspects which include physico-chemical changes in food, as well as paying attention to aspects of geography, history and tourism. In other words, according to their view, gastronomy is a field of study that studies practically how to turn food ingredients into dishes, theories related to food science, as well as technical aspects involving food performance and systems. In addition, gastronomy also includes the development of food products,

Gastronomy has components that are used to classify culinary fields that are considered according to gastronomic values. According to Messakh and the Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia in (World Tourism Organization., 2017), they formulated that Indonesian Gastronomy has aspects which were then conceptualized into The Triangle Concept of Indonesian Gastronomy (Indonesian Gastronomy Triangle Concept). This concept consists of three main aspects: 1) Food: Is the main aspect in gastronomy which is the main attraction.

The focus in gastronomic activities is on the food itself. 2) Culture: Refers to culture related to gastronomic activities. This aspect emphasizes the traditions of creating, serving and tasting food related to local culture. 3) History: Describes the development of food from the past to the present. This aspect maintains the original story and authenticity of the food.

In addition, there are several elements that influence each other and are related to these aspects: (1) Ritual/ceremony, this element is the background for the creation and application of food in cultural activities. Rituals or ceremonies are often related to the preparation, serving, or consumption of food; (2) Spices, this element links the creation of food with the history of its development through the use of spices and seasonings, as well as the associated meaning behind their use; (3) Storytelling, this element gives life to aspects of food by bringing together historical and cultural aspects to be told and passed on.



Fig. 2. The concept of the Indonesian gastronomic triangle. Source: Messakh, (2017)

With these elements, Indonesian gastronomy acquires an interesting and unique concept, combining aspects of food, culture and history with elements such as rituals/ceremonies, spices/spice and stories.

# Food, Culture and History with Elements such as Rituals/Ceremonies, Spices/Spice and Stories Ase Porridge Gastronomy

Porridge is a variant of food that is cooked using lots of water, so it has a soft texture. In Indonesia, porridge is often served as a favorite breakfast menu. Interestingly, there are various types of porridge that vary in each region, according to the goals and philosophies contained therein. In an article titled "All Porridge, a Symbol of Poverty" by (Cheung et al., 2022), the history of using porridge in Indonesia is explained by Murdijati Gardjito, a professor and food researcher from Gadjah Mada University. The story behind this bowl of porridge actually tells of the struggles of life at a critical time in Indonesia, especially in Java. This was also supported by the resource person Mr. Yahya, as an observer of Betawi culture:

"In the past, porridge was considered a symbol of poverty because it was associated with difficult economic conditions and limited food. This illustrates that people had limited access to rice and porridge as the main food at that time. Emphasis on the symbol of porridge poverty strengthens understanding of the historical and cultural significance of porridge in the social and economic context of the past."

During the colonial period, porridge was only consumed when there was a crop failure or people could not afford to buy enough rice. Porridge is also consumed when there is a setback in the harvest or when facing another rice crisis. Therefore, porridge is processed by mixing it with lots of water to meet food needs. Porridge is generally different from traditional Javanese cuisine because porridge has no connection with the empire that once flourished in Java. Instead, porridge was born from the lower class, who struggled to meet food needs. Among the Chinese, porridge is seen as a symbol of poverty, while among the Javanese, porridge is seen as a symbol of equity. Through porridge, food can be divided evenly and enjoyed by many people.



**Fig 3**. Ase Porridge Source: Researcher (2023)

Ase porridge is made from rice, which is soaked in water and cooked until it becomes mush with a thick and soft texture. Ase porridge is generally served with additional stewed meat/egg, salted anchovies, salted mustard greens, and bean sprouts and is often served with crackers as a garnish. According to Yahya. besides that his statement is also supported by (Muliani, 2019) also said Bubur Ase has a sweet taste and a distinctive aroma due to the use of water pandan rice in the cooking process. This food is often served as a dessert or snack at various traditional Betawi events, such as weddings, circumcisions, or other traditional events.

#### Food as Historical

Ase Porridge has a significant difference compared to other types of rice porridge, such as Cianjur Porridge, Cirebon Porridge, or Sukabumi Porridge, which have been known as popular breakfast alternatives for people in Jakarta. Bubur Ase's specialty lies in the combination of rice porridge served with ase and pickled sauce, and sprinkled with crackers, fried peanuts, chives, fried soybeans, fried anchovies and fried shallots. According to Mr. Yahya said:

"Ase" is a term in the Betawi language which refers to semur, there is luk semur and it is given a curry sauce like vegetable lontong kuh, only added with stew."

This is similar to what was said by bang lopi as a seller of ase porridge in the Tanah Abang area.

"Ase, the soup is runny, if Cirebon porridge uses opor sauce, if Betawi uses stew."

Unlike the Betawi demur, which actually has a thick gravy, the ase sauce used in Bubur Ase has a larger amount of gravy. Ase sauce usually contains chunks of meat, potatoes, and sometimes tofu or eggs, depending on the maker's taste and economic ability. Even though the broth is runny, this doesn't detract from the enjoyment of the taste. The use of typical spices for stews, such as nutmeg, pepper, ginger and cloves, remains a mainstay in the presentation.

### Food as Ritual / Ceremony

A ritual ceremony is a series of actions, processions, or practices conducted regularly within the context of religion, culture, or spirituality (Amaliyah, 2015). Ritual ceremonies have the purpose of honoring, honoring, or communicating with sacred entities, commemorating important events, or orchestrating actions that have symbolic meaning. Ritual ceremonies often involve a prescribed series of steps or protocols, including prayers, chants, dances, offerings, or other acts of deep sacred value. The purpose of the ritual ceremony may vary depending on different beliefs and cultural contexts.

The Baritan or Babarit traditional ceremony comes from the term "Baritan" which refers to the earth's alms. This tradition is carried out by the Betawi people, especially those who are descendants of KramatAris and live in the area (Eirin, 2021). Kramat Aris himself is one of the students of Sunan Gunung Djati or Syarif Hidayatullah. Kramat Aris' real name is Aris Wisesa, and he is often called Pak Aris. During his lifetime, Pak Aris was famous for helping others, so he was respected by the local community. Initially, the Baritan ceremony was held to honor the ancestors and make a pilgrimage to the Kramat Aris grave.



Fig. 4. Baritan Ceremony Source: Saputra (2023)

At present, the Baritan Traditional Ceremony is held with the intention of expressing gratitude for the abundance of crops. Usually, this ceremony is held once a year on Hari Raya Agung, precisely on the 10th of the month of Hajj. The implementation of this ceremony took place at the Ganceng Sacred Palace and was led by the caretaker of the Ganceng Sacred Heart.

Pak Yahya said a different thing, who said:

"The principle is that every time you want to hold a wedding, circumcision or whatever it is, there must be a pangkeng shaman to pray for food to be a blessing, and no one knows about this shaman, only those who have an urgent need and do it as a pledge between those who have an intention and the pangkeng shaman."

A ritual ceremony is a series of actions, processions or practices performed regularly in a religious, cultural or spiritual context. Its purpose is to honor, communicate with, or commemorate a sacred entity. The Baritan traditional ceremony is a tradition of giving alms to the earth which is carried out by the Betawi people, especially the descendants of Kramat Aris (Somantri & Merlina, 2014). This ceremony expresses gratitude for the crops and is usually held once a year on Hari Raya. In certain events such as weddings or circumcision ceremonies, there is the presence of a dukun pangkeng who offers prayers to bless the food (Embas, 2018; Sunandar, 2017).

#### Food as Culture

Ase porridge illustrates the rich cultural diversity of the Betawi people. This is reflected in the various materials used. There are at least three cultures contained in a plate of ase porridge, namely Chinese, Middle Eastern and Dutch culture. Reportedly, rice porridge itself was introduced by the Chinese community. Other ingredients believed to have been developed by the Chinese immigrants include bean sprouts, tofu and soy sauce. The word "semur" itself comes from the Dutch language, "smoor," which means cooking by slow boiling with tomatoes and onions. This smoor recipe then developed in Indonesia and became a stew. The influence of Middle Eastern culture can be seen in the use of various spices and seasoning mixtures in the ase porridge.

## History as Culture

History as an integral part of culture has played an important role in shaping the identity, development and heritage of a society. According to Mr. Yahya:

"At the beginning of the 20th century, ase porridge became a popular snack in the middle of the city. However, over time, the popularity of ase porridge began to decline due to the emergence of new, more fashionable foods. Even so, there are still some people who really like ase porridge and become loyal fans of this food. A strong interest and love for ase porridge has brought these people together and formed a community of foodies. In this community, they can share their preferences for ase porridge, form friendships, and interact with each other. This community plays an important role in maintaining the existence and appreciation of Ase Porridge as well as being a place for fans to meet and share culinary experiences."

Mr. Yahya's perspective highlights the role that history has had in the rise to fame of ase porridge. In spite of declining interest, the community of foodies who cherish Ase Porridge is vital to the dish's continued existence and growth in prestige.

#### History as Spices

The Betawi people have been eating Bubur Ase Betawi for generations. The unique flavor of AseBetawi porridge comes from a combination of herbs and spices. Chinese and Middle Eastern culinary traditions influenced the use of herbs and spices in traditional Ase Betawi porridge (Kartika & Kartika, 2022). Ase porridge features Chinese-inspired additions including bean sprouts, tofu, and soy sauce. The Ase porridge dish has been heavily influenced by the Chinese minority that has long resided in Betawi. In addition, Middle Eastern influence is also seen in the use of various spices and seasonings in Ase's porridge. The Middle East is known for its richness in spices and the abundant use of spices in its dishes. According to Mr. Yahya

"In Ase porridge, the use of spices such as nutmeg, pepper, ginger and cloves give a distinctive aroma and taste. Over time, Ase Betawi porridge has become an iconic dish that continues to be enriched with various flavors and variations."

This proves that for the dish of tamarind porridge itself in spices there is a very strong history starting from the use of soy sauce, cinnamon, cloves and pepper (Kemendikbud, 2019). The use of herbs and spices in Ase Betawi porridge illustrates the blend of culture and culinary heritage which is an important part of Betawi culinary identity.

Bubur Ase has a deep cultural meaning for the Betawi people. Apart from being a delicious dish, Bubur Ase also involves ethical and cultural practices that need to be considered when enjoying it. Bubur Ase is generally eaten as breakfast or a snack throughout the day and is served in a bowl using a spoon. Usually, the ingredients in the Bubur Ase bowl are mixed before starting a meal to even out the taste. To give more dimension to the dish, toppings such fried shallots, stewed beef, salted mustard greens, peanuts, and crackers are commonly used. Savoring the flavor of Bubur Ase and understanding the significance of this dish in its culture go hand in hand. When partaking in Bubur Ase, it is crucial to remember the history of the Betawi people and their contribution to the cuisine.

#### Challenges faced for Betawi culinary

The challenges faced in maintaining the existence and sustainability of Betawi culinary delights have encouraged the expansion of efforts to preserve this rich cultural heritage. Betawi cuisine faces various challenges in maintaining its sustainability and existence. According to Mr. Yahya, one of the challenges faced by Betawi culinary:

"Betawi cuisine faces several challenges that need to be overcome to maintain its sustainability and existence. These challenges include the influence offoreign cultures and the emergence of fast food that changes people's preferences, changes in busy lifestyles and less time to enjoy traditional dishes, demograp hic changes that can reduce the demand for Betawi dishes due to population migration and urban growth, as well as a decrease in culinary heritage due to lack of successors capable of preserving traditional recipes and cooking techniques. Efforts to preserve Betawi culinary are important in facing this challenge so that this rich cultural heritage can be maintained and enjoyed by future generations."

Efforts to preserve Betawi culinary through awareness raising, promotion, education, and community and government support are important keys in facing this challenge. One of the suggestions hoped for by Pak Yahya as a Betawi culturalist is that the government, especially the regional government of DKI, should incorporate various types of Betawi culture in activities carried out at the regional government as well as making dishes related to Betawi with the aim of preserving Betawi culinary specialties.

#### 4. Conclusion

Bubur Ase, a rare Betawi specialty, has significant cultural and traditional values. This food is the result of acculturation of Chinese, Arabic and Middle Eastern cultures. Ase porridge is consumed as a whole dish consisting of a mixture of stewed broth with dried bean sprouts, salted mustard greens, and crackers. Ase porridge can be enjoyed as a main dish or as a snack. Although in the past it was often served at weddings or sedekahbumi / baritan ceremonies, the cultural value of Bubur Ase has begun to be neglected. However, Bubur Ase was not completely extinct nor was it growing rapidly. The role of the government is very important in preserving this Betawi culinary heritage, including serving Betawi food and culture in various government activities, especially in DKI Jakarta.

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