



Examining the Meaning of the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* Traditional Ceremony for Coastal Communities A Case Study in Kebumen, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the meaning of the traditional ceremony for the Kebumen Regency fishing communities. *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut*, an ancestral cultural heritage that Javanese people, especially coastal communities, is still carried out and considered to have a message and power to ask for safety. This research used a qualitative approach with descriptive data. The participants in this research were community leaders who are key informants and the people who work as fishermen. The data were collected using interviews and literature studies to discover the community's meaning of the traditional ceremony *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut*. The results showed that the people interpret such ceremonies as a form of hope and expression of gratitude for the wealth of the sea to God Almighty. Such a hope is made so fishermen and communities around the coast have abundant results. The hope is also intended to obtain safety while earning a living at sea. This research can be used to educate the current Indonesian generation to understand cultural meaning from cultural ceremonies such as the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* traditional ceremony.

Keywords: Coastal community, *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut*, meaning, traditional ceremony.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tradition of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is an ancestral cultural heritage that is inherent in the lives of Javanese coastal communities. *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is a tradition developed in Javanese society as a form of expression of gratitude by performing rituals, such as throwing offerings or food into the sea. *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* comes from the word “*grebeg*” which means celebration, “*suran*” or *Sura* which means the first month of the Javanese calendar, and *sedekah laut* means giving something to the sea. *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* generally means a celebration held in the month of *Sura* by giving something to the sea. The tradition of *sedekah laut* is still carried out in several coastal areas of Indonesia, one of which is in Kebumen, Central Java. Coastal communities still believe in the *sedekah laut* because it is considered to have a fundamental role in people's lives (Purwahida, Yunika, & Nugrahani, 2008).

According to Nuraini and Asriandhini (2023), *sedekah laut* is a *selamatan* ceremony carried out by coastal communities by sailing *jolen* containing offerings. *Selamatan* is a Javanese traditional ceremony performed as a form of gratitude to God. *Sedekah laut* contains messages and norms that are still used by the community as guidelines for life. Therefore, research related to the meaning in the procession of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* needs to be done to find the values and functions contained in the ceremony so that they can be utilized by the community in their daily lives.

Sedekah laut is a local wisdom that describes community life that is used as cultural preservation, communication, and life guidance (Isnaeni, 2020). Coastal communities perform the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* ceremony to ask God for abundant sustenance and to be spared from disasters while at sea. The *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* ceremony carried out for generations by the community proves that culture and tradition are formed from the human mindset.

According to Abdurrohman (2015), humans form a culture by communicating things through symbols. Humans have the ability to create symbolic language as a meaning of values that ultimately form a culture. *Sedekah laut* as one of the cultures that depart from the habits of the community has symbols and meanings based on community beliefs.

There have been many studies on the *sedekah laut* tradition, such as research conducted by Husiyah and Ahmad (2022) with the title “Sea Alms Tradition of the Java Pantura Community in the Perspective of Islamic Education”. However, the research that has been done only focuses on the meaning of *sedekah laut* from an Islamic perspective. This research focused on the meaning of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* for coastal communities in Kebumen which can be used as a guide to life. The results of the meaning of *sedekah laut* can be used as a means of education for the current generation regarding the tradition of *sedekah laut*. In addition, it can be used as an alternative to maintain and introduce culture to the current generation.

2. METHOD

This research used a folklore theory approach. Folklore studies were used because the research conducted was related to culture and *sedekah laut* is included in partially oral folklore. The method used in this research was a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Research in the humanities mostly uses qualitative methods that produce descriptive data (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Qualitative research was chosen because the problems studied are related to the community and require actual data, namely about the meaning of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* according to coastal communities in Kebumen Regency.

The participants in this study were community leaders who became key informants and the general public who work as fishermen in Kebumen Regency, especially Mirit Sub-district. The researcher took several sample places to obtain data from informants, such as Miritpetikusan, Rowo, and Lembupurwo villages. The data collection techniques in this research were interviews and literature studies. Interviews were conducted using an interview instrument containing the informant’s personal data and interview questions.

Data processing techniques were carried out using the Miles and Huberman model. After conducting interviews, the data was then transcribed and searched for key points based on the formulation of the problem. The results of the reduction in the previous stage were presented in the form of descriptions to facilitate data analysis. The last stage, namely verifying by ensuring that the data obtained was valid and in accordance with the primary source.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut in Kebumen Regency, especially in Mirit Sub-district, which is held in the month of *Sura* or the first month based on the Javanese calendar, is a fishermen’s event that has meaning as an expression of gratitude for the abundance of sustenance obtained from the sea and an expression of gratitude to God for being given safety while earning a living at sea in the previous year. In addition, *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is also used by the community as a form of request so that in the following year they will still be given abundant results, smooth sustenance, safety while at sea, kept away from danger or marine accidents, and get prosperity, both in terms of material and social. Basically, *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is just a momentum that signifies gratitude for everything that has been given by God because every day people are still grateful and always pray to God to be given smoothness when making a living at sea (Paino, interview, August 1, 2023).

According to key informants, sea alms on the coast of Kebumen Regency were originally a tradition carried out by fishermen, but nowadays almost all coastal communities believe in the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* ceremony (Paino, interview, August 1, 2023). The community considers that *sedekah laut* can be used as a guide to life that has functions and norms for life. The *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* tradition is a *selamatan* ceremony carried out by throwing offerings into the sea. The throwing of offerings in the procession of *sedekah laut* has a meaning as a sense of community responsibility for the enjoyment and safety they have received during the previous year. Coastal communities in Kebumen Regency hope that when they throw offerings, God can see their sincerity in asking for and expecting blessings from the sea products that have been obtained.

The offerings are put into *jolen* or Javanese traditional houses. Based on information from key informants “The first *ubo rampe* prepared is called *jolen* which looks like a *Joglo* house” (Slamet, interview, July 25, 2023). *Ubo rampe* are offerings that contain various kinds of food and are thrown into the sea. *Jolen* comes from the Javanese word “*oyo klalen*” which means don’t forget. According to key informants, the naming of *jolen* has meaning as a form of advice from ancestors through signs so that humans always remember God who has provided sustenance and safety. In addition, it is also a reminder not to do bad things outside the norm (Paino, interview, August 1, 2023). *Jolen*

contains various types of offerings as a form of giving from the community of objects that are considered valuable. In other words, the objects presented are the best crops for the community to offer to the creator.

The offerings consist of several types and each type has its own meaning that can be used as a life guide and reminder for the community. In the offerings, there are goat heads or buffalo heads, but in Mirit Sub-district usually uses goat heads as the main offerings and have meaning as something valuable from the past that has been obtained from the sea so goat heads are known as the wealth of the sea (Slamet, interview, July 25, 2023). In addition, people also interpret the goat's head as sincerity, while the bag of the goat is considered as ignorance so when it is slaughtered it aims to eliminate ignorance among fishermen. In this case, it is associated with the basic knowledge that must be possessed by fishermen before going to sea, such as things that must be prepared before going to sea and knowledge of various natural signs that can be used as determinants of good weather for fishing. Furthermore, *ingkung* or rooster dishes come from the ancient Javanese language, namely "*jinakun*" which means nurturing, and "*manekung*" which means praying. *Inkung* means that humans always bow down or humble themselves and pray to God (Paino, interview, August 1, 2023).

There are offerings that are complementary but have meaning, such as *jajanan pasar* or traditional food bought at the market, *jenang abang putih* or red and white colored porridge, *ghodong towo* or dadap leaves, *kembang setaman* or seven kinds of flowers, and *pring kuning* or yellow bamboo. *Jajanan pasar* are traditional foods that are usually sold in the market, *jajanan pasar* consists of a variety of foods and usually consists of sweet foods. *Jajanan pasar* has a meaning as a form of safety in life and a request to be given blessings in life. The blessing in life means that our lives can always be happy and sweet according to the taste of *jajanan pasar*, and have a colourful life according to the many kinds of *jajanan pasar*. Furthermore, offerings of *jenang abang putih* or red and white porridge are associated with the term "*sedulur papat kalima pancer*". *Sedulur papat kalima pancer* comes from the words "*sedulur*" which means brother, "*papat*" which means four, "*kalima*" which means five, and "*pancer*" which means centre. Overall, *sedulur papat kalima pancer* has the meaning of four brothers who exist in humans and one center that accompanies humans from birth to death or is simply interpreted as a companion in human life associated with Javanese beliefs (Priyanto, Priyatiningsih, & Deswijaya, 2020). According to key informants, *jenang abang putih* symbolizes human origins and is therefore associated with "*sedulur tua sedulur enom, kakang sawah adi ari-ari getih puser pancer*", the philosophy of human birth in ancient Java (Paino, interview, 1 August 2023). *Jenang abang putih* is used as a symbol of the birth of a child so that every person has an obligation to respect their parents. In addition to symbolising human origins, according to key informants *jenang abang putih* is known as *jenang sengkolo*. *Sengkolo* comes from the Javanese language which means disaster so that *jenang sengkolo* as a symbol of disaster also has a meaning that humans are always close to God and pray to be kept away from all disasters. The offerings of *ghodong towo* or *ghodong sewu* or *dadap* leaves have the meaning that if someone makes a mistake, that someone must ask for a thousand apologies. The *towo* leaf means "*kalis dari beboyo*" which means to be kept away from danger. *Towo* comes from Javanese which means "*kalis saka sambikala rubeda*" or kept away from danger (Paino, interview, August 1, 2023).

The *kembang setaman* offerings consist of several types of flowers or often referred to as seven flowers, such as *telon* flowers, red roses, white roses, *kenanga* flowers, and others symbolise beauty and broad knowledge. In a sense, fishermen must do something based on knowledge so that what they do can be likened to fragrant flowers. *Pring kuning* or yellow bamboo is a symbol that symbolizes all that is sincerely done and run straight only for good can achieve glory (Darsino, interview, 28 July 2023).

The offerings also have various meanings that can be used as life guidelines for humans, ranging from sincerity, the importance of having the knowledge to be kept away from ignorance, always praying to God to be kept away from disasters and get blessings in life, and always apologizing if you have mistakes.

In the traditional ceremony of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut*, there are two values obtained, namely the meaning in the ceremony itself which comes from a series of processions and social values. *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* in the Mirit Sub-district of Kebumen Regency consists of several processions. Based on statements from key informants during interviews, the series of *sedekah laut* processions carried out today have some differences from the *sedekah laut* procession in ancient times. However, the difference in the implementation of the procession during the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* ceremony does not make the meaning and purpose of the *sedekah laut* different (Alamsyah, 2013). In several villages in Mirit Sub-district, the procession of *sedekah laut* begins with a *selametan* on the night before the day of the *larungan*. *Selametan* is a Javanese traditional ceremony conducted by praying and eating together as an expression of gratitude (Amin, 2017). *Selametan* has a meaning as a form of gratitude for the gifts and blessings that have been given by God. On the night of the *selametan*, the community will usually share "*berkat*" or food obtained by the invitees when attending the *selametan* as a form of concern for others and gratitude.

After *selamatan*, people will do *tirakatan* at night or stay awake until morning. The *tirakatan* night is an acculturation between local religious traditions and nationalism (Muhammad, 2016). *Tirakatan* night is carried out on the night before the implementation of *sedekah laut* by praying together, distributing food that has been made by the fishing community, and keeping watch or not sleeping until morning. *Tirakatan* night as a symbol of finding the path of truth or goodness for the community is done by reflecting on what has happened during the year. This is done so that people can realize what they have done in the previous year so that they can improve themselves to become better people.

The highlight of the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* ceremony begins with the parading of *jolen* to the sea. *Jolen* or miniature Javanese traditional houses contain offerings or food that will be thrown into the sea. *Jolen* parading is one of a series of *sedekah laut* processions together, starting from the house of the elder or village head to the sea or the seaside. Parading *jolen* together has a high social value meaning, namely the community working together, fostering togetherness, and mutual tolerance.

Every procession always begins and ends with a prayer, either an Islamic prayer or a Javanese prayer led by an elder. The prayers used are tailored to the needs. According to the key informant during the interview, "Our prayer is still only asking for safety. That is, first, we ask for safety, a lot of sustenance, and to be kept away from danger. Basically, that's it. The prayer is an Islamic prayer. In the old days, it was just a mantra" (Paino, August 1, 2023). In essence, the prayer addressed to God is a hope that the community will always be given sustenance and safety while making a living at sea. The existence of prayers in this ritual is evidence of the interaction between humans and God. After throwing the offerings into the sea, the fishing community will hold a fishermen's *selamatan* which aims as an expression of gratitude to God for all the good things that have been given during the year. During the *selamatan*, the elders will explain the meanings of each procession and offerings so that the community always remembers the advice given by the ancestors through signs. The *sedekah laut* procession is closed with entertainment, even for some villages *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* opens with entertainment in the form of puppet shows. The value that can be taken by humans or society and utilized in everyday life is to always pray to God and always remember God in all situations.

Not only from the series of processions and offerings in the *sedekah laut* ceremony, the values that can be used as a guide to life are also social values that come from the interaction between fellow humans during the procession. Social values in *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* include the creation of social relationships between individuals in society and being able to form communication. In addition, the social value contained in *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is training cooperation, creating tolerance, and establishing friendship between communities. The meaning contained in each series of processions is related to community norms that can be used as guidelines for life, for example, fellow humans must help each other in doing something. The value of tolerance also appears in the implementation of the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* traditional ceremony, which is the difference in beliefs between communities, but there should be no division. Everyone has their own beliefs and beliefs, but in the implementation of the *sedekah laut* ceremony, all people respect each other by continuing to help the fishing community to prepare everything needed for the smooth implementation of the traditional ceremony. The value that arises in a series of processions can be used by the community as a guide in everyday life to always respect and appreciate each other.

Coastal communities in Kebumen Regency interpret *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* as a symbolic interaction between humans and God. The community realizes and believes that all abundance of sustenance and safety comes from God so they must be grateful and pray to God. Kebumen people understand that humans must always be grateful to God for all the blessings and gifts given. Through the tradition of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut*, coastal communities in Kebumen Regency want to manifest this gratitude (Darsino, interview, July 25, 2023). The main purpose of the traditional ceremony of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* basically leads to belief and as a form of reflection of the life of coastal communities to express gratitude to God for all the wealth and sustenance obtained from the sea and ask for abundant results in the coming year (Yahya, 2019).

In principle, *sedekah laut* becomes wisdom that describes people's lives which are used as cultural preservation, entertainment, communication, and life guidance. In cultural preservation, the Kebumen community has a belief that *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is a tradition that must be preserved and cannot be abandoned because it has become a hereditary legacy from ancestors so that the existence of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* must be maintained as local cultural wisdom. *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is also used as a means of entertainment and communication by the community through *kuda lumping* dance performances and puppet shows. *Kuda lumping* is a dance that is played with artificial horses made of woven bamboo. Puppet shows are not just for entertainment but also have meaning. The story played is the Mahabharata which provides life lessons for the community to always be realistic in living life and can take moral values in it. According to key informants during the interview, *wayang kulit* or puppet performances, apart from being entertainment, are also believed to be a form of repelling bad luck or an effort to avoid various forms of misfortune. In the *sedekah laut* tradition, there are many lessons that can be used as guidelines for life.

Based on the results of the research, *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* has various meanings contained in each series of traditional ceremonial processions that can be used as guidelines for life. For example, advice given by ancestors through signs so that humans always do the right thing, do good according to the norms, and do not do things that can harm themselves or others. *Sedekah laut* also contains religious and social meanings. There is a symbolic relationship between man and God and man and man. Humans as creatures of God must always be grateful and pray to God. As social creatures, humans must always help each other, work together, and respect, and appreciate each other. In addition to being a guide to life for humans, carrying out the sea alms tradition regularly can also be an alternative to preserve culture and introduce culture to the current generation.

4. CONCLUSION

Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut as an ancestral cultural heritage that has been passed down for generations certainly has differences in the procession, but still has the same meaning. Coastal communities in Kebumen Regency have a belief in the *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* tradition because it is considered to have a fundamental role in life. The traditional ceremony of *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* is carried out as an expression of gratitude for the sustenance and safety provided. *Sedekah laut* as a cultural symbol has meaning and contains norms that can be used as guidelines for human life. There are many life lessons that can be used as a reminder for humans to stay close to God. The people of Kebumen make *sedekah laut* a routine event as a form of cultural preservation. Based on the results of the research, *Grebeg Suran Sedekah Laut* has various meanings, values, and functions that can be utilized by the community. In the series of *sedekah laut*, there is advice given by the ancestors through signs so that humans always do good and avoid bad things, always pray and remember God, have a sense of tolerance and mutual respect, and always be grateful for everything that has been obtained in life.

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