

## RELIGION AND CULTURE SYNCRETISM IN THE KLENIK TRADITION IN THE JAVANESE COMMUNITY OF BINJAI CITY

Sasi Alwiyah\*, Sahrul

Sumatera Utara State Islamic University, Indonesia

### Abstract

*It has become a classic thing that culture cannot be separated from the lives of people who follow their respective religions. For us Muslims, not all cultures are in line with religious teachings. One of them is the occult tradition which is considered shirk by several Islamic figures. However, in reality, this tradition is still widely practiced by the Javanese people in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, Binjai City, the majority of whom are Muslim. This illustrates the syncretism between religion and culture in the occult tradition. This research aims to examine the form of syncretization of the occult tradition. In this case, the researcher uses a type of qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The data collection tools used were observation, documentation and interviews. The data sources in this research are interviews with village elders and people who practice this tradition. From the research conducted, the results can be concluded that the syncretization process in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village begins with occult traditions that are difficult to eradicate as well as beliefs that have been passed down from generation to generation regarding the community's understanding of these traditions. So, it can be said that the value of syncretization in this tradition lies in the procedures and forms of belief of the Javanese people in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village towards this occult tradition, for example, they still believe in the activities of throwing salt and burning sulfur around the house to protect against the supernatural.*

*Keywords: Syncretization; Klenik tradition; Javanese society.*

### INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the vast majority of people follow Islam (Nur, Mohamed, & Rambely, 2021). By observing the sizeable Muslim population, the dynamics of its dispersion, and the degree to which the local community accepts Islamic doctrines. According to Kusumo, syncretism in this community is a synthesis of religion and regional culture (Kusumo, 2015).

Tradition is one of the things that make Indonesia special and diverse (Rohmah, Masturoh, & Rauv, 2022). WJS Poerdaminto defined tradition as a society's culture, habits, rituals, and even ingrained ideas (Rofiq, 2019). All things considered, syncretism demonstrates the distinctive qualities of Javanese culture (Ghozali, 2023). This results from the various customs and cultures that exist throughout Indonesia (Mahdayeni, Alhaddad, & Saleh, 2019). The wages of the Batak tribe (Mandailing) (Hasruddin Dute, 2022), the custom of burning stones from Papua (Hasruddin Dute, 2022), the tembuni maintenance ceremonies in Sundanese culture, and even occult traditions that are still practiced by Javanese people are just a few examples.

The term "syncretism" comes from the term "sun," which means "unity" or "unity." There are also those who say that it comes from the words "syin" and "kretiozen", which indicates a paradoxical combination of various elements (Adde, Nelson, & Yansah, 2021). According to Mulder, syncretism in a religious context includes efforts to eliminate differences and achieve unity between various religious sects through the introduction of new doctrines and dogmas. Followers of syncretism usually believe that every religion has truth and goodness. This syncretic practice is seen in Javanese-Islamic society, where people combine elements from various religions, such as

\*Correspondance Author: [sasi0103201007@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:sasi0103201007@uinsu.ac.id)

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Hinduism, Buddhism, Civa-Budha (Budhaperwa), and local traditions with Islam. Their beliefs and way of thinking are influenced by this combination (Hernawan, Zakaria, & Rohmah, 2020).

The term "culture" originates from the Sanskrit word "*kulturh*" (Mursyidah & Hasanah, 2020). This term is the plural version of "buddi," meaning "mind or reason," and it encompasses all things associated with human reason. In addition to being the product of all human conceptions, acts, creativity, perceptions, and experiences aimed at satisfying life's needs—all of which are structured in social life—culture is also an expression of human mental abilities in creating, feeling, and thinking (Setyaningrum, 2018), (Sumarto, 2018).

According to Koenjaraningrat, culture encompasses all systems of human cognition, behavior, and creation that permeate people's lives as they are learned. Conversely, Edward B. Taylor asserted that culture encompasses all intricate things, including information, convictions, artistic expression, morals, legal frameworks, customs, and other abilities that an individual possesses as a member of a community (Faris, 2014).

The culture of the Javanese people is indeed quite high, especially for those who practice mixed beliefs (Ningsih, 2019). For the vast majority of Javanese tribes, the occult tradition is a developing cultural legacy. A complex component of Javanese customs and culture is occultism. This relates to two beliefs: the existence of supernaturally gifted ancestors' spirits and the belief in gods and goddesses who are seen as equal to God. In addition, ceremonial rites are performed at the graves of specific figures as part of this tradition to worship God, seek for blessings, and fulfill specific requests (Alifuddin & Setyawan, 2021).

Regarding syncretism—the blending or blending of religion and culture, specifically between Islam and Javanese religions—it is observed that Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village celebrates the month of Muharram annually on the 10th of the month, which is known as the month of Suro in Javanese society. This practice occurs and is still frequently carried out there. Thus, every year on Suroan night, the Javanese community in this area cooks a variety of meals and enjoys them as a group (Aryanti, 2020). (Dhiyaul Auliyah & Arief Sudrajat, 2022) describe a practice that should not be forgotten: red and white porridge is prepared and placed on a banana leaf fashioned like a bowl. After prayer, the porridge is rinsed away in a ditch or huge ditch with the aim of doing so. With any luck, bad will not come to them. This custom is practiced by the Javanese community here as a means of preventing misfortune, illness, and natural calamities.

In addition, after speaking with Mr. Karsun, a traditional Javanese wedding interpreter (a *Temoan*), one of the local elders was interviewed. He claimed that there had long been a blending of religion and culture, dating back to before his parents. The custom of the bride and groom meeting, followed by the groom stepping on an egg and the bride washing his feet with water, is called *Temoan* in traditional Javanese wedding customs. Then came *Marhaban*, which involves chanting prayers and then spreading flowers. This is not a part of Islamic faith, but it has been infused with Javanese culture and has grown to be a custom at Javanese weddings.

These mystical and cultural ideas are not in line with, or even at odds with, the tenets of Islam, it has been determined after examination into their significance. Islamic doctrines and regulations were revealed by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad saw. This was stated by Sheikh Mahmud Syaltut. In addition, Allah made it His mission to invite everyone to adopt this faith and to disseminate it over the globe (Bakar, 2016). According to (Amin, 2019), the Islamic principles of Tawhid hold that humanity have the right to worship Allah Swt as the sole God who created the universe.

M. Quraish Shihab wrote in his book "Knowing God Through His Creation" that the notion of Tawhid is the understanding of God via two primary elements: the universe and the individual. It is believed that both the universe and human existence are examples of God's majesty. Humans employ reason and reason to make sense of the universe (Alim, 2019), and from these conclusions they draw inferences that bolster their inner faith. God's names are regarded as perfect and glorious because God personally selected them. Then, using Allah's asthma—also known as asma al-husna,

which is frequently recalled by repetition—the essence and character of Allah are explained (Khoiriyah, 2022). Al-Qur'an surah Al-Ikhlās verses 1-4 articulate the Islamic notion of monotheism.

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ، اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ، لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ، وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

Meaning: "Say (Muhammad), "He is Allah, the Almighty. Allah is the place to ask for everything. (Allah) is neither begotten nor begotten. And there is nothing equal to Him."

The profound wisdom of Surah Al-Ikhlās abounds. Tawhid, or the conviction that Allah Swt is one, is a topic that is extensively covered in this surah. Particularly in the final verse, which declares that no creation can equal or match Allah Swt oneness, the message concerning Allah's unity is reinforced (Zunaenah, 2018).

According to research done through an interview with Mrs. Nuriah, a community member, this occult ritual is a hereditary practice that has been passed down from their parents since ancient times. Occult traditions come in a variety of forms, and people follow them to keep their lives from being disrupted by ghosts or other entities that are thought to cause problems. For instance, burning sulfur and scattering coarse salt around the house are the most common practices. These two activities are completed shortly before dusk or before Isha time. They don't often do this, but occasionally, when someone in their family or a child is ill, they believe that spirits are bothering the child and do the ritual in those situation. It is clear from the explanation above that the actions of the local community are at odds with the notion of Tawhid, which is faith in Allah SWT's power. The vast majority of individuals in this region were raised as Muslims and follow the principles and commands of Islam, which include praying, fasting, giving alms, performing the hajj, attending taklim meetings and tasbih prayer groups, among other things. However, they also persist in adhering to customs that depart from the Islamic understanding of faith. The gap between theory and reality in occult rituals is an intriguing phenomenon that has been noticed in Javanese society, particularly in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, Binjai City. This is unexpected, particularly for scientists who wish to carry out more research. Because of this, scholars are interested in comprehending the process of religious and cultural syncretism that underlies occult rituals in the Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village neighborhood of Binjai City. The goal of this study is to identify and examine the religious and cultural values that the Javanese people of Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, Binjai City, still uphold through their occult traditions.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative technique (Lambert & Lambert, 2012) and a phenomenological approach (Eddles-hirsch, 2015) to analyze phenomena associated to traditional behaviors. The study was carried out in the East Binjai District of Binjai City, specifically in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village. The study sample comprised five distinct groups of informants: religious leaders, village elders, neighborhood heads, and community members who upheld customs. Documentation, interviews, and observation were employed as data collection methods. Data reduction, data transmission, and conclusion drafting are stages of data analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village Community Description

One of the subdistricts of Binjai City's East Binjai District is Sumber Mulyo Rejo. Ten hamlets or communities make up Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village. In 2023, the sub-district of Sumber Mulyo Rejo is expected to have 8,665 residents. The bulk of individuals in this subdistrict are employed as laborers or workers; over 50% are farmers, roughly 20% are traders, and roughly 30% are other occupations. This sub-district has an 85% Muslim population. Javanese people predominate in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village.

The community's propensity for regularly engaging in acts of mutual assistance is still a strong indicator of its tolerance and cohesiveness. This region's Javanese population still enjoys practicing customs and behaviors that have been passed down through the generations, such as

lumping horse shows (Springate & STUDIES, 2009), reog (Yurisma & Bahruddin, 2020), and other practices that help maintain Javanese culture.

Klenik is a multifaceted religious activity with an extremely wide-ranging history in Indonesia. During a clenicology group discussion, Ariz Fauzan from Muhammadiyah University Yogyakarta gave an explanation of the history of occultism in Indonesia. Diverse belief systems, such as dynamism, animism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, as well as different schools of these systems, such as Darmo Gandul, Gatolojo, and others, are practiced in Indonesia (Ismail, 2015). These beliefs have their roots in the long-standing local culture and the later religious movements.

He also said that although if a lot of the religion's beliefs are regarded as controversial, its adherents view them as sacred. For example, the Javanese translation of the Kamasutra is frequently linked to Darmo Gandul's book. Additionally, the term "occult" is frequently used because of the human idea that God is the source of light. The Qur'anic reference to Allah as "the light of the heavens and the earth" in surah An-Nur lends further credence to this understanding. Another group that believes in light is the Isyraqiyyah sect, which was founded by people like Sahrawardi. According to Sahrawardi, the separate lights are the creator, the immaterial intellect, and the God that each species worships.

The idea of occult beliefs, aside from the conviction that God is the source of light, originates with the narrative of the Prophet Solomon. The notion that Prophet Solomon possessed the ability to communicate with other animals was widely held and eventually served as the model for numerous other beliefs. Strangely, Prophet Solomon also understood that people can become ungrateful and unmindful of God as a result of his advantages.

Javanese people frequently engage in mystical rituals called dukun. As per the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), a shaman is an individual who provides treatment, casts spells, and helps those who are ill or experiencing troubles (Jannah, 2022). There are others who assert that a subset of them possess the capacity to communicate with the afterlife. Dukun are referred to by numerous terms in Javanese, who have long been aware of their presence. According to Geertz, there are many different kinds of dukun in Javanese culture, including massage dukun, infant dukun, prewangan dukun (meaning medium), Lacak dukun (circumcisers), Wiwit dukun (who perform harvest ceremonies), and Temanten dukun (who are specialists in ceremonies marriage), the ability to anticipate numbers by a petungan dukun, the ability to administer treatments with gold needles under the skin by an implant dukun, or a shir interpreter, and many more (Huda, 2015).

Amulets are frequently used by dukun to treat a variety of ailments. This is the second approach to healing. In addition to their medical applications, amulets were frequently worn as symbols of protection for the wearers. This kind of amulet is frequently worn around the waist of the wearer as a dagger, a piece of paper with a mantra written on it, or even a tiny coral stone around the neck (Kiptiyah, 2021).

Third, magic—also called santet, or the capacity of humans to manipulate nature—is a deeply held belief among Javanese people. Many kinds of magic are typically used to achieve particular goals, such drawing attention to oneself, boosting corporate success, or pursuing unnatural fortune. The Javanese people take all of these magical practices seriously and don't minimize their effects because they see them as typical means of achieving specific objectives. Those who use this magick typically speak with a shaman or other spiritual advisor to receive guidance and support (Herniti, 2012).

Discussing customs, which are inherited practices or activities that are passed down through the generations. including the occult customs that the Javanese community in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, Binjai City, continues to practice. Following an interview with Ibu Rasmi, one of the remaining practitioners of this technique, she revealed that at first, this practice was exclusively practiced as a means of self-defense, having been passed down to them from their parents or ancestors. This takes place during specific occasions or undertakings. For example, when someone is ill, the first thing to do is burn inggu (sulphur) and scatter coarse salt around the house

as a kind of self-defense against otherworldly meddling. A child wears a necklace or bracelet made of colorful threads bundled together when they are still a newborn, generally filled with delingubengle. Additionally, as a sign of respect for the newly inhabited house, it is customary in Java to hang coconuts, bananas, and leaves from coconuts on tumah poles when building or moving into a new home. In addition, a teplok lamp or flashlight is typically placed inside freshly constructed homes each night to serve as a source of light and a signal that the home is already owned and will be occupied.

In addition, the Javanese people in this region traditionally present rice packets bearing the word *among-among*, which contains anointed rice, as a way of commemorating or bestowing a child's name. Aside from sharing rice, they also prepare red and white porridge, which is left in the baby's nursery as a welcome gesture for the ancestors, who come to visit and meet their new family members. There are numerous other customs. Not only are these occult customs followed occasionally, but they are not always followed.



Figure 1. Tradition of throwing salt in the area around the house

As seen in the image, someone is performing the custom of tossing coarse salt, which is typically done when a family member becomes ill. They believe this to be the result of a genie disturbing them. Additionally, this salt-throwing practice is done right before Maghrib or Isha time.



Figure 2. The custom of adding flashlights to newly constructed homes

As the image depicts, someone is doing the custom of mounting flashlights in an unfinished house. They believe that this was done to indicate that the house was already owned by someone, preventing supernatural beings from occupying it. Some of the numerous traditions and customs that Javanese people continue to practice on a daily basis are practices that violate the teachings of Islam. Islamic lessons should be drawn from social traditions that are the result of human impulses

and that are obviously influenced by polytheism, apostasy, khurafat, weird notions, tyranny, and other undesirable things.

Islam naturally gravitates toward a lifestyle that is visible in public. As long as there are no conflicts that prevent these cultures or customs, they are acceptable. The norm for performing acts of worship is not what the predecessors or forefathers did, but rather what the Qur'an and Sunnah say. Islam offers something that many refer to as *Tauhid* (belief), which serves as a safeguard against engaging in actions that depart from Shari'a. Tawhid, which holds that Allah is the only God and implies that He is the Creator of everything, can have a mystical standard. He is the primary cause of all that occurs, the ultimate aim of everything, and the First and the Last. Not only must we maintain our faith in Allah's power, but we also adhere to the Prophet's Sunnah because he sets a wonderful example for us. In Islam, it is mandated to constantly recite the Al-Qur'an as a means of protection for both oneself and the home where it is consistently read, making ghosts afraid to approach, if throwing salt is known in Klenik tradition to ward off spirits disturbing oneself. The most crucial need is that everything we do must be motivated by Lillahi Ta'ala's purposes, meaning that everything exists solely because of Allah Swt. We must avoid taking any actions that could potentially provoke Allah Swt displeasure.

### **Syncretism's Significance in the Occult Customs of Binjai City's Javanese Community**

There are several forms or kinds of activities carried out in the occult tradition in Javanese society, including; honor the spirits of your ancestors and distribute to your neighbors, honor mystical beings and express gratitude to Allah Swt, and embrace all of Allah Swt creatures with kindness.

Honor the spirits of your ancestors and distribute to your neighbors. This custom is practiced similarly to naming a child or the so-called among-among, which involves giving neighbors anointed rice in exchange for charity. In addition, the custom is always followed: red and white porridge is made in a banana leaf bowl, coffee and water are added, and the whole thing is placed in the baby's sleeping quarters. They think that in order to meet new family members, the spirits of their ancestors will pay them a visit. Javanese people tend to have this notion. Koentjaraningrat claims that Javanese people typically hold the belief that a person's spirit will transform into a *le lem*, a spirit creature, and will reside in the area surrounding their home after death. The family will then hold a slametan at a specific hour as a symbol that the spirit has passed on to the eternal spirit realm when the spirit eventually leaves the location over time. Spirits can still be reached when needed, despite this. The Javanese people in this area have inherited occult rituals that blend a tradition of honoring ancestors with giving alms to neighbors. The syncretism in this occult activity is demonstrated by the manner in which the ritual or procedure is carried out.

Honor mystical beings and express gratitude to Allah Swt. One of the cultural aspects of the occult traditions practiced by the Javanese people in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village is the reverence for otherworldly entities. For a variety of reasons, the people of Java believe that we, as humans, have a duty to show respect to these otherworldly entities by providing them with a variety of meals and beverages, or *sesajen*.

Embrace all of Allah Swt creatures with kindness. In Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, the majority of people are Muslims, yet they nevertheless think that supernatural beings share human emotions like jealousy, rage, and so forth. In Javanese society, this principle is ingrained in the mystical traditions. They still firmly believe in the Almighty Allah SWT, and they continue to show respect for supernatural beings in the hopes of bringing more order into their life. This is considered a means of avoiding temptations and diversions from supernatural sources while remaining concentrated on praising Allah SWT. This cultural value is supported by Islamic teachings, which place a strong emphasis on maintaining positive relationships with divine beings. The significance of maintaining positive relationships with all of God's creation—both visible and invisible—is also emphasized in this lesson. This idea is further supported by the Prophet Muhammad's hadiths. In response to Umar bin Khatab's question about the Prophet's capacity to communicate with the

dead, the Prophet said that this was a feature of his supernatural life. „Those who sent me the truth can hear me more clearly than you can, even if they are mute“.

We can relate to God's supernatural creatures as well as to our fellow people, as the aforementioned hadith shows. Islam encourages us as humans to treat all of Allah SWT's creatures with kindness and compassion. In Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, cultural values are generally more prevalent than religious values in the occult traditions of Javanese society. Other than the innate cultural values.

## CONCLUSION

Syncretism is the blending of pre-existing culture and religion, leading to the emergence of a variety of traditions in Indonesia. similar to the occult tradition, which is one of the customs of Javanese society. In Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, Binjai City, the Javanese community, which has been carried down through the generations, remains strong in practice. The practices of the Javanese occult traditions in Sumber Mulyo Rejo Village, which blend Islamic rituals with indigenous cultural practices, demonstrate the importance of syncretism in these traditions. The majority Muslim population follows all of Allah's commands, including prayer, fasting, zakat, and others, and they believe in a power that has been passed down from their parents through the generations. This involves practicing occult traditions that are connected to mysticism, which many scholars believe leads to shirk. Beneath it all, though, are distinct cultural values: honoring the dead and revered ancestors, appreciating the good creatures, and fostering positive interactions with every creature Allah has made. Giving alms or sharing with neighbors are two examples of customs that are followed and are completely consistent with religious principles. Additionally, it is proper for Muslims to live out their beliefs in compliance with the established Shari'a, using the Al-Qur'an as a manual for life and the Prophet's sunnah as a model for doing good actions for other people.

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