

INTEGRATION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES AND LOCAL WISDOM: STRATEGY FOR STRENGTHENING LOCAL TRADITIONS TOWARDS THE SELF-IDENTITY OF THE COMMUNITY OF BATUBARA DISTRICT

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the religious values contained in the local wisdom of the Malay community in Batu Bara Regency through the traditions of *Pesta Tapai*, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau*, which are held before the month of Ramadan. The research problem focuses on the form of religious values contained in these three traditions and their contribution to strengthening spirituality, social solidarity, and the preservation of local wisdom based on Islam. This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Data collection was carried out through field observations, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community members, and documentation studies. The results show that *Pesta Tapai* functions as a means of strengthening religious values and empowering the community's economy; the *Mogang* tradition plays a role in strengthening social bonds and togetherness through *kenduri* activities; while *mandi belimau* is interpreted as a symbol of self-purification and spiritual readiness in welcoming the holy month of Ramadan. These three traditions not only function as customary practices, but also become a medium for internalizing Islamic values in the social life of the community. This research contributes to enriching the study of the integration of religious values and local wisdom, and emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural traditions as a means of strengthening religiosity, Malay-Islamic cultural identity, and passing on local values to the younger generation in Batu Bara Regency.

Keywords: Strengthening; Religion; Local wisdom; Batu Bara district.

INTRODUCTION

Batu Bara Regency is a coastal area in North Sumatra with a long history and rich Malay culture. Since the 17th century, this region has been known as the center of a kingdom that preserves various social and religious traditions passed down through generations. To this day, the local community still maintains several intangible cultural heritages, such as the *Tapai Festival*, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau*, which are generally held before the holy month of Ramadan (Disporabudpar Batu Bara, 2025). These traditions reflect the synergy between Islamic values and local culture and serve as symbols of the coastal Malay community's identity.

The *Tapai Festival* originated from a royal policy that replaced the vendors' alcoholic beverages with *tapai* and *lemang*. Over time, this tradition has evolved beyond a religious ritual into a folk festival that revitalizes the local economy through the sale of traditional foods. The symbolic value of *tapai* and *lemang* is understood as a representation of gratitude, camaraderie, and a spirit of togetherness in welcoming the month of Ramadan (Disporabudpar Batu Bara, 2025). This tradition aligns with Koentjaraningrat's (2009) view that culture is a system of meaning that regulates social life, including within a religious context.

The *Mogang* tradition, also known as *meugang*, is the practice of slaughtering buffalo or cattle before Ramadan. The meat is prepared cooperatively and then enjoyed with family and the community. More than just food consumption, *mogang* serves as a medium for strengthening social

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bonds, instilling the value of gratitude, and demonstrating solidarity among residents. Such collective rituals strengthen social integration and reinforce a sense of belonging within the community. This is also evident in the Batu Bara Malay community, where Mogang is understood as a communal ritual that strengthens social cohesion (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

On the other hand, *Mandi Belimau* is seen as a symbol of self-purification before Ramadan. This tradition uses natural ingredients such as kaffir lime leaves, pandan leaves, lemongrass, and flowers, which serve to cleanse and perfume the body. Although not directly derived from religious teachings, *Mandi Belimau* reflects the local wisdom of the Malay people in combining Islamic spiritual values with cultural practices. From Geertz's perspective (1973), this tradition constitutes a "symbolic system" that reflects how society gives meaning to religious events through distinctive cultural practices.

These three traditions serve as strong evidence that the Batu Bara community is capable of maintaining cultural continuity while adapting to changing times. These traditions are maintained because the values they contain are inherent in the community and the socio-religious values of other traditions within the Batu Bara community. In addition to religious value, these traditions also serve social, economic, and cultural educational functions for the younger generation. This function aligns with Blumer's (1969) view of symbolic interaction, where social actions are guided by collectively constructed meanings. In this context, preserving local traditions in Batu Bara not only safeguards ancestral heritage but also serves as a strategy to confront the tide of globalization that tends to erode local values (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Community involvement in these three traditions is also very dominant. At the Tapai Festival, the community is present not only as participants but also as economic actors by selling *tapai*, *lemang*, and other traditional culinary delights. At Mogang, involvement is evident in the form of mutual cooperation, whether in slaughtering animals, cooking red curry, or sharing the produce with neighbors and relatives. Meanwhile, at *Mandi Belimau*, the community works together to prepare traditional concoctions, perform rituals, and make it a moment for social interaction among residents. This collective participation demonstrates that tradition is not an elitist activity, but rather a shared property that is maintained and passed down from generation to generation. This aligns with Blumer's (1969) view that social meaning is formed through interaction, making active community participation key to the sustainability of tradition.

Thus, research on the *Tapai*, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* traditions is not only important for recording cultural heritage, but also relevant to examining how the Batu Bara Malay community articulates identity, strengthens spirituality, and strengthens social cohesion through local wisdom practices that align with Islamic teachings. The existence of mutual continuity with the above traditions, through economic, social, cultural, and religious improvements in the implementation of traditions at certain times indicates an important value and is part of the reminder of the arrival of the month of Ramadan in Batu Bara Regency.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods, aimed at understanding the meaning, value, and function of the *Tapai*, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* traditions in the lives of the Malay community in Batu Bara Regency. This approach was chosen because tradition, as an intangible cultural heritage, cannot be separated from its social context, symbolic values, and community involvement (Spradley, 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Values in the Local Culture of the Batubara Community

Local culture plays a strategic role in shaping the social and spiritual fabric of society, particularly in regions whose identity is rooted in Malay traditions, such as Batu Bara Regency. The Islamic values internalized by the community do not exist in a vacuum, but are closely interwoven

with local customs and traditions passed down through generations. In this context, the *Tapai*, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* Festivals represent a concrete manifestation of cultural and religious integration. These three traditions are not only interpreted as ceremonial activities in the lead-up to Ramadan, but also as expressions of gratitude, togetherness, and self-purification (Disporabudpar Batu Bara, 2025). These traditions demonstrate that Islamic teachings in the Malay community of Batu Bara developed through an adaptive and peaceful cultural process, resulting in a down-to-earth form of Islam—rooted in tradition yet imbued with a religious spirit.

The main strength of Batu Bara's local culture lies in its ability to integrate Islamic teachings into social life without creating conflict between religion and tradition. The values of gratitude, brotherhood, mutual cooperation, and social responsibility are not only taught in the mosque but also brought to life through cultural activities involving all levels of society. At the Tapai Festival, for example, the buying and selling of *tapai* and *lemang* is not merely an economic activity but also a symbol of the blessings of sustenance shared with others. This tradition demonstrates how the community interprets Islam through simple yet spiritually meaningful activities (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

On the other hand, the social values of local culture are evident in the spirit of togetherness fostered through Mogang. This activity brings together residents from various walks of life to slaughter, cook, and enjoy meat as a form of gratitude ahead of Ramadan. The mutual cooperation activities, from slaughtering and cooking to distributing the proceeds to underprivileged families, reflect the Islamic principle of *al-musawah*. This process strengthens relationships between residents, fosters a sense of caring, and creates a warm atmosphere of brotherhood. The values of togetherness and mutual cooperation present in this tradition align with the Islamic principles of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* and *ta'awun* (community-based cooperation), which emphasize the importance of helping one another in good deeds (Qardhawi, 1997; Shihab, 2007).

Likewise, the *Mandi Belimau* ritual holds profound spiritual significance. The water used in this ritual, a mixture of kaffir lime, pandan leaves, lemongrass, and flowers, is interpreted as a symbol of self-purification before the holy month. The community believes that physical and spiritual purity is the best preparation for worship. This practice teaches the importance of maintaining cleanliness, simplicity, and balance between humans and nature. This tradition also serves as a reminder of God's greatness as the Creator who provides natural resources for human well-being (Nasr, 1996; Shihab, 2007).

Community involvement in these three traditions is very high. Every level, from children to adults, actively participates in preparing the events, making *tapai*, cooking *gulai mogang*, and preparing the belimau bathing potion. This cross-generational collaboration not only strengthens social bonds but also serves as a natural medium for moral education. Children learn about responsibility, togetherness, and respect for ancestral traditions. This interaction fosters an awareness that preserving culture means preserving the Islamic values inherent within it (Geertz, 1973; Lickona, 1991).

Batu Bara's local cultural potential also plays a role in strengthening the community's economy. During the Tapai Festival, for example, many MSMEs earn income from selling traditional foods, crafts, and local products. This economic value goes hand in hand with the values of blessing and togetherness, demonstrating that local wisdom can form the foundation for strengthening an economy based on Islamic spirituality. This concept aligns with Islamic principles of lawful, honest, and beneficial trade.

Thus, local culture in Batu Bara Regency is not merely a legacy of the past, but rather a system of values that shape the community's social piety. The traditions of the *Tapai* Festival, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* affirm that culture and religion can coexist harmoniously. Through these traditions, the community learns about gratitude, cleanliness, mutual cooperation, and sincerity—values that align with Islamic teachings and continue to strengthen the Islamic identity of the Batu Bara Malay community to this day (Syahrani, D., & Zulkifli, H. 2025).

The Challenges of Globalization and the Need for a Contextual Approach

Globalization has had a complex impact on the sustainability of local traditions in Batu Bara Regency. On the one hand, technological and communication advancements have made it easier for people to interact and exchange cultures widely; on the other hand, this has also led to a shift in values and a waning interest in regional traditions among the younger generation. This phenomenon is evident in the decreasing number of young people actively participating in activities such as the *Tapai* Festival and the *Mandi Belimau*, while most are more attracted to modern activities considered more practical and engaging. This challenge highlights the urgent need to develop a contextual approach to cultural preservation that connects local values with the spirit of the times (Syahrani, D., & Zulkifli, H. 2025).

The Batu Bara community recognizes that these changes are inevitable, but they can be directed to align with Islamic values and Malay identity. A traditional leader in Dahari Selebar Village, Talawi District, said in an interview, "Many children today prefer playing with their phones and online games to helping their parents make *tapai*. But here, we are trying to slowly introduce the meaning of the *Tapai* Festival, not just about selling, but also about friendship and gratitude. If it is not passed down, that sense of togetherness will disappear." This statement reflects the community's concern about the erosion of the values of togetherness and spirituality that were once so strongly embedded in every tradition. A similar sentiment was expressed by one of the young people who helped with the *Mogang* activity, "If we don't participate, who will? We still want to maintain this tradition, but there must be a new way to attract young people." This statement demonstrates the younger generation's awareness of preserving culture, but in a more contextual form that is in line with today's lifestyle (Interview with community informants, 2025).

A contextual approach to preserving traditions can be implemented by linking the Islamic values inherent in local culture with modern social issues. For example, the *Mandi Belimau* tradition can be used as a means of environmental education and ecological awareness, as the practice utilizes natural ingredients from local plants. Similarly, the *Tapai* Festival can be developed into a creative economy event based on halal food, or *Mogang* can be reinterpreted as a moment of social solidarity to help the poor ahead of Ramadan. In this way, traditions are not only preserved but also contextualized to make them relevant to global challenges and the needs of modern society (Nasr, 1996; Qardhawi, 1995).

Furthermore, globalization also presents challenges in the form of cultural commercialization. Many traditional activities are now being adapted into tourist festivals without regard for their core spiritual values (Alfian, M. 2023). Several residents expressed concern that the religious significance of the *Tapai* Festival was being displaced by economic interests. A *tapai* vendor said, "Now many people come just to buy and take selfies, instead of joining in communal prayers like before." This situation reflects a shift in societal orientation that needs to be balanced with a strategy of strengthening Islamic values in every cultural activity to ensure its spirit is not lost (Interview, 2025).

To address this challenge, a contextual and participatory approach to preservation is crucial. Local governments, Islamic educational institutions, and indigenous communities can collaborate to transform traditions into a medium for cultural da'wah and character education. This effort aligns with the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, a blessing for the universe, which values cultural diversity as long as it does not conflict with Islamic law. Several studies have shown that involving local communities in cultural preservation design increases a sense of ownership and enhances the effectiveness of value transmission, particularly when linked to Islamic teachings and local social ethics (Qardhawi, 2004; UNESCO, 2012).

Thus, the challenges of globalization require the Batu Bara community to not only maintain traditions but also reinterpret their values to ensure their relevance to today's generation. Through a contextual approach that combines Islamic values, education, and creativity, local traditions such as the *Tapai* Festival, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* can continue to live on as sources of morality,

spirituality, and identity that distinguish the Batu Bara Malay community amidst the rapid flow of modernization (Giddens, 1991).

The Relationship of Tradition to the Inculcation of Religious Values in the Malay Community in Batu Bara

Tradition is an effective medium for internalizing religious values among the Batu Bara Malay community. In the context of Nusantara Islamic culture, tradition is not merely a legacy from ancestors, but a form of social practice that serves to instill moral, spiritual, and social values contextually (Amiruddin, S., & Hasyim, R. 2023). Traditions such as the *Tapai* Festival, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* not only contain symbolic dimensions but also represent a mechanism of religious education based on collective experience. The community does not simply carry out rituals from generation to generation, but rather interprets them as part of worship that strengthens human relationships with God and others.

The religious value of the *Tapai* Festival is evident in the symbolic meaning of *tapai* and *lemang* as a representation of gratitude and togetherness before the holy month of Ramadan. The *tapai*-making process is carried out collectively by women in the village, while men play a role in preparing the venue and holding the communal prayer. This collective activity fosters a spirit of mutual assistance, simplicity, and gratitude for the sustenance given by God. The communal prayer held before the *tapai* is distributed strengthens the community's spirituality, instilling an awareness that every blessing in life comes from the Creator. Thus, the *Tapai* Festival plays a dual role as a means of social interaction and a vehicle for cultural preaching that strengthens the community's religious spirit (Geertz, 1973; Shihab, 2007).

In the *Mogang* tradition, the instilling of religious values is realized through activities of sharing and mutual cooperation. The slaughter of livestock before Ramadan symbolizes sacrifice and gratitude. After the meat is processed, the community shares it with neighbors and less fortunate families without regard to social status. This activity teaches the values of Islamic brotherhood, *al-musawah*, and *ta'awun* which are core teachings of social Islam. Through these interactions, the community is encouraged to understand that the strength of faith is measured not only by personal worship but also by social contributions to others. *Mogang* activities emphasize that Islamic values thrive through the practice of togetherness, not merely through religious rhetoric (Qardhawi, 1997; Shihab, 2007).

Meanwhile, *Mandi Belimau* is a more personal and symbolic form of religious expression. The ritual bathing with kaffir lime juice, pandan leaves, lemongrass, and flowers not only aims to physically cleanse the body but also marks the purification of the heart before the arrival of the holy month. Its meaning reflects the teachings of *tazkiyatun nafs*, namely the purification of the soul from all negative traits so that it is worthy to meet Ramadan in a state of purity. *Mandi Belimau* also reflects the Malay community's ecotheological awareness of the environment, as the use of natural materials is seen as a form of respect for God's creation (Al-Ghazali, 2000; Nasr, 1996). Thus, this ritual integrates the values of physical cleanliness, spiritual purity, and concern for nature, three dimensions that are the foundation of Islamic ethics.

Interviews with the Head of the Batubara Regency Cultural Service, religious leaders, and community leaders reinforce this interpretation. A community leader in Dahari Selebar Village stated, "Traditions like *Tapai*, *Mogang*, and *Belimau* are not just customs, but our way of remembering Allah together. Our children are taught gratitude, patience, and togetherness without being told. They see firsthand how their parents pray and share." This statement demonstrates how religious values are instilled through social role models born from cultural activities, not just through verbal learning. Traditions serve as a means of character and moral formation, where Islamic values are not taught theoretically but brought to life through real-life experiences and involvement (Interview, 2025).

Besides serving as a vehicle for moral education, these traditions also strengthen the community's communal spirituality. Shared prayer, shared meals, and collective work foster a sense of spiritual closeness among individuals. The shared value of *barakah* (blessings) fosters a social

religious awareness—that blessings come not only from individual worship but also from harmony among residents. Thus, traditions in Batu Bara serve an integrative function: strengthening social cohesion while instilling an inclusive and contextual religious awareness.

Furthermore, cross-generational involvement in maintaining and carrying out traditions demonstrates the continuity of Islamic values within the social structure of the Batu Bara Malay community. Children are invited to help make *tapai*, teenagers prepare the venue, and parents lead communal prayers, creating an intergenerational religious education process. Through this pattern, values such as *ta'dzim* (respect for elders), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood and brotherhood) are naturally instilled. These values shape the community's mindset that maintaining tradition means maintaining faith, and maintaining faith means preserving the Islamic heritage embodied in daily life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lickona, 1991).

Thus, the relationship between tradition and the instillation of religious values in Batu Bara Malay society is symbiotic and dynamic. Tradition serves as a medium for cultural *da'wah*, spreading Islamic teachings in a form that is easily accepted and practiced by the community. On the other hand, Islamic values provide moral and spiritual direction for the continuation of tradition, ensuring it remains a form of worship, not merely a habit. This collaboration between custom and religion is what gives Batu Bara Malay society its distinctive religious character—religious, inclusive, and deeply rooted in local values passed down from generation to generation (Geertz, 1973).

Strategies for Preserving Tradition and Strengthening Islamic Identity in the Modern Era

Preserving local traditions in the modern era presents a unique challenge for the Batu Bara Malay community. Changing lifestyles, technological advancements, and the influx of foreign cultures have resulted in a shift in values and a decline in the younger generation's participation in traditional activities. Therefore, strategies are needed that are not merely ceremonial but also integrate Islamic values, character education, and social innovation. Traditions such as the *Tapai Festival*, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* have great potential as a means of moral development and strengthening the community's Islamic identity. Preserving traditions is not simply about preserving heritage, but also about maintaining the spiritual and social meaning that underpin the life of the Batu Bara community (Giddens, 1991; Tilaar, 2009).

Strengthening the Role of Religious and Traditional Leaders

Religious and traditional leaders hold a strategic position as bridges between Islamic values and local culture. They serve as role models in preserving the spiritual meaning of traditions so they are not reduced to mere commercial activities. In an interview with a mosque imam in Dahari Selebar Village, It is stated, "If a tradition is carried out with the intention of worship and accompanied by prayer, then it becomes a good deed. But if it's just a party without remembrance, the blessing is lost." This statement demonstrates the important role of religious scholars and traditional leaders in providing moral and spiritual guidance so that Islamic values remain the primary spirit of every tradition. Collaboration between religious institutions, village governments, and indigenous communities is a crucial first step in strengthening the preservation of tradition-based religious values.

Local Wisdom-Based Education

The second strategy is the integration of traditional values into formal and non-formal education systems. Schools and Islamic schools (*madrasah*) can incorporate traditions such as the *Tapai Festival* or the *Belimau Mandi* into their history, culture, or Islamic religious education lessons. This helps students understand the meaning of their own culture and fosters contextual religious character. Education based on local wisdom can also revitalize the younger generation's interest in tradition. Through extracurricular activities such as *tapai*-making training, Malay poetry competitions, or traditional documentation, Islamic values of togetherness and spirituality can be instilled in practical and enjoyable ways.

Digitalization and Promotion of Islamic Culture

The development of digital technology needs to be utilized as a means of preserving and promoting traditions. Social media, documentary videos, and online platforms can be used to introduce the Islamic values inherent in Batubara Malay culture to the younger generation. Society is now more easily connected through the digital world, so preservation approaches must also adapt to this trend. For example, village youth can create educational content about the religious significance of the Tapai Festival or a tutorial on how to make a Belimau bath potion in the form of short, informative videos. This strategy not only preserves the existence of culture but also changes the community's perspective, fostering pride in their local heritage.

Development of a Creative Economy Based on Islamic Values

Economic activities emerging from tradition can be directed into a creative economy with religious values. Typical products such as *tapai*, *lemang*, or handicrafts can be developed as icons of halal food and regional ethnic products. Local governments, along with communities, can conduct Sharia-based entrepreneurship training to enable MSMEs to uphold the principles of halalness, honesty, and blessings in their businesses. Thus, tradition not only generates social and spiritual activities but also becomes a source of economic prosperity based on Islamic values and the independence of local communities.

Collaboration between Government, Academics, and Local Communities

Efforts to preserve traditions cannot be effective without cross-sector synergy. Local governments play a role in policy and budget support, academics contribute through research and scientific mentoring, and local communities are responsible for maintaining the continuity of cultural values on the ground. This synergy enables sustainable preservation with a strong scientific and social foundation. For example, this can be achieved through cultural documentation programs, teacher training based on local wisdom, and Islamic cultural festivals that remain oriented toward values education. This collaboration creates space for traditions to continue to develop without losing their spiritual roots (Tilaar, 2009).

All of the strategies above emphasize that preserving traditions in Batu Bara cannot be achieved solely through ceremonial activities or administrative reporting, but must be built on the community's collective awareness of the religious values they contain. Preservation based on Islamic spirituality will produce living traditions that serve to educate and foster the character of a faithful and cultured community. This approach enables the younger generation to view traditions not as relics of the past, but as a bridge to establishing a strong identity amidst the rapid flow of globalization.

From a broader perspective, the preservation of Batu Bara Malay traditions is also part of the effort to build a contextual Islamic civilization in the archipelago. Traditions such as the *Tapai* Festival, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau* prove that Islam did not come to eliminate culture, but rather to purify it from elements that conflict with the values of monotheism. Through preservation oriented towards education, economics, and cultural da'wah, the Batu Bara community has succeeded in demonstrating harmony between religion and tradition as a concrete manifestation of Islam, rahmatan lil 'alamin. This effort not only preserves cultural heritage but also strengthens the spiritual and social foundations of society in the modern era full of challenges (Azra, 2013; Qardhawi, 2004).

Transformation of Tradition as a Medium for Islamic Preaching and Education in the Batu Bara Malay Community

Social developments and technological advances require communities to not only preserve traditions but also transform them to remain relevant to the needs of the times. In Batu Bara Regency, several local traditions, such as the *Tapai* Festival, *Mogang*, and *Mandi Belimau*, have begun to change in form and meaning without losing their core religious values. These traditions now serve as effective means of preaching, conveying moral and spiritual messages with a gentle,

communicative, and contextual cultural approach. The community understands that Islamic values do not have to be conveyed through pulpits or formal institutions, but can be brought to life through symbols, rituals, and social practices passed down through generations.

This transformation can be seen in the active participation of the younger generation in repackaging traditions in more creative ways. For example, the Tapai Festival now includes more than just communal prayers and a culinary bazaar, but also includes a nasyid competition, short sermons, and Islamic arts performances. This activity serves as a fun space for da'wah (Islamic outreach), combining cultural and Islamic elements. Through these activities, the younger generation gains an understanding that Islam does not reject culture but rather guides it to be imbued with worship and moral values. This approach reinforces the concept of cultural Islam, a form of da'wah rooted in local wisdom without diminishing the substance of religious teachings.

Besides serving as a medium for preaching, the transformation of tradition also serves as a means of character education. Values such as discipline, responsibility, sincerity, and solidarity are naturally instilled through community involvement in every stage of the activity. Children who help make tapai learn about cooperation; teenagers involved in the *Mogang* ceremony learn about trustworthiness and leadership; while women who prepare the Mandi Belimau concoction instill the values of purity and cleanliness as part of faith. This process creates a non-formal education system that operates socially and emotionally, not merely intellectually. This tradition-based education is able to foster contextual religious character, forming a faithful, civilized, and cultured society.

Furthermore, the role of religious leaders and Islamic educational institutions in Batu Bara is also crucial in guiding the transformation of this tradition in a positive direction. Ustaz, teachers, and traditional leaders act as mediators, maintaining a balance between modernization and the preservation of values. In an interview with a madrasa teacher in Bogak Village, he stated, "We invite students to participate in the Tapai Festival not just for entertainment, but so they understand that culture is also part of religion. If they understand its meaning, they will not abandon it." This perspective demonstrates that involving educational institutions in cultural activities is an effective strategy for simultaneously instilling a love for tradition and religion.

Transforming tradition can also broaden the reach of Islamic preaching within a heterogeneous society. Through tradition, religious messages can be conveyed with a more subtle, inclusive approach, and one that touches the emotional side of society. For example, in Mogang, the call to share and be grateful is conveyed not through a formal sermon, but through the concrete act of sharing meat with neighbors. In this context, tradition becomes a living preaching, a form of preaching embodied in everyday social behavior. This makes Islam not only a belief system but also a way of life that is integrated with the cultural realities of the Batu Bara Malay community (Azra, 2013; Tilaar, 2009; Interview, 2025).

Thus, the transformation of tradition in Batu Bara demonstrates that Islamic preaching and education can develop through cultural channels without losing their spiritual significance. Tradition is not merely a symbol of the past, but rather an instrument for developing the community that is relevant to today's challenges. Through the integration of Islamic values, education, and local culture, the Batu Bara Malay community has succeeded in maintaining the continuity of its Islamic identity while simultaneously opening up space for innovation and modernity while remaining rooted in religious tradition.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that the traditions of the Batu Bara Malay community, such as the Tapai Festival, Mogang, and Mandi Belimau, are not merely cultural heritage, but rather represent the integration of Islamic values and local wisdom that are alive in the community's social practices. These traditions serve as a means of instilling religious values, a medium for cultural da'wah, and a vehicle for moral and spiritual education that occurs naturally and across generations. Values such as gratitude, togetherness, brotherhood, trustworthiness, and tazkiyatun nafs (respect for the soul)

are not only conveyed normatively but are internalized through social practices that shape the community's religious character. Thus, Islam in Batu Bara appears as a contextual and down-to-earth ethic of life, not merely a theological dogma. Amidst the tides of globalization and modernization, local traditions in Batu Bara demonstrate strong resilience. The community is able to maintain a balance between openness to change and commitment to the Islamic values that underpin their culture. Transforming traditions into a medium for *da'wah*, education, and a culture-based creative economy is a crucial strategy for maintaining their relevance in the modern era. This success is supported by collaboration between religious leaders, educational institutions, local governments, and local communities in maintaining the continuity of traditions that have religious and social value.

Furthermore, preserving traditions based on Islamic values has been proven not only to strengthen cultural identity but also to serve as an instrument for moral formation, character education, and strengthening social cohesion. Community religiosity grows through role models, togetherness, and social experiences, not through indoctrination alone. This pattern of preservation can serve as a model for the development of cultural Islam in other regions of Indonesia. As a reflection, this research emphasizes that preserving traditions must be oriented toward upholding the spiritual, moral, and social values within them. Traditions need to be turned into learning spaces for the younger generation through educational approaches, cultural outreach, and the use of digital media. Thus, traditions in Batu Bara remain alive as a bridge between the past and the future, as well as a foundation for an Islamic civilization with character and rooted in local wisdom.

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