

THE PRACTICE OF MERTI DESA TRADITION IN BUILDING COMMUNITY HARMONY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the practice of Merti Desa tradition in Kemranggen Village, particularly in building community harmony. This field research was conducted with a qualitative descriptive method. The study was carried out in Kemranggen Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency, Central Java Province from January to March 2021. The informants of this research were the leaders and all parties involved and witnessed the events of Merti Desa activities in the village. Data was collected through observations, interviews and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through four stages, namely: data documentation, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/ verification. Study findings indicated that the entire series of Merti Desa activities in Kemranggen Village built the harmony of the community through participation, cooperation and mutual assistance regardless of differences in religion, ethnicity, race, social strata and profession.

Keywords: Cultural Practice, Merti Desa, Harmony

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan praktik tradisi Merti Desa di Desa Kemranggen, khususnya dalam membangun kerukunan masyarakat. Penelitian lapangan ini dilakukan dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian dilaksanakan di Desa Kemranggen, Kecamatan Bruno, Kabupaten Purworejo, Provinsi Jawa Tengah pada bulan Januari sampai Maret 2021. Informan penelitian ini adalah para pimpinan dan

semua pihak yang terlibat dan menyaksikan langsung peristiwa kegiatan Merti Desa di desa tersebut. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui empat tahapan, yaitu: dokumentasi data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan/verifikasi. Temuan studi menunjukkan bahwa seluruh rangkaian kegiatan Merti Desa di Desa Kemranggen membangun kerukunan masyarakat melalui partisipasi, kerjasama dan gotong royong tanpa membedakan agama, suku, ras, strata sosial dan profesi.

Kata Kunci: Laku Budayai, Merti Desa, Kerukunan Umat.

INTRODUCTION

Merti Desa is one of the traditions in Indonesia which is routinely carried out in Kemranggen Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency, Central Java Province. *Merti Desa* is part of the community ways to express gratitude to God Almighty for the abundance of grace and gifts in the forms of abundant agricultural crops and safe, peaceful, calm and harmonious community life. The expression of gratitude is carried out with a traditional procession in each part of village, hence is called *Merti Desa*¹.

Indonesia is a pluralistic country with various religions, ethnicities, races and various characteristics of different cultures and traditions². This diversity could be both an asset and a thread. Diversity is a gift from God Almighty when people are able to contemplate, to be grateful and to use it for positive sides. Meanwhile, diversity could be a threat when each party group is overproud of their own religions, races and ethnicities and looking down on religion, ethnicity and other races³. As a nation, Indonesia is recognized globally for its unique and diverse tradi-

¹ Ken Widyatwati and Mahfudz, "Merti Desa: The Existence Of The Tradition Of The Agrarian Community In Semarang Regency," *Jantra* 14, no. 1 (2019).

² Dede Burhanudin, "Vihara Dhanagun Dan Komunikasi Budaya Di Kota Bogor, Jawa Barat," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 16, no. 1 (2018): 160.

³ Hannani, "Hukum Islam dan Multikulturalis- Pluralitas di Indonesia," *Jurnal Hukum Dikum* 11, no. 1 (2013): 32–46, <https://doi.org/10.30984/as.v11i2.171>.

tions and culture. The richness of culture and tradition is getting more colorful with the inclusion of foreign cultural values acculturated to preexisted local culture and traditions. The process of cultural enrichment can occur through assimilation and acculturation, both of which contribute to the cultural diversity of Indonesia⁴.

One of the processes of forming a new culture is called assimilation, namely the fusion of two or more cultures to take values that can be unified so that they become one culture with a combination of various cultures⁵. Anthropologists have long been interested in examining the occurrence of two or more assimilated cultures and their effects on cultural and social change in a community. On the other hand, it must be realized that cultural change does not always indicate the progress of a nation. If this cultural change constitutes a hegemonic war, it actually represents a setback. The linkages and intersections between various cultures among Indonesian ethnic groups are very important to understand their influence on social life. Community groups as a social community and social institutions among ethnic groups are a structural form of society formed by the similarities of their respective characteristics and cultures. with its own pattern⁶.

Culture or tradition is a priceless treasure because it is the identity of a nation or a community. The current era of hegemonic war must be a warning for us to maintain our traditions and culture so that we are not lost in this hegemony. A great nation is a nation that is able to maintain its own culture and influence other nations with its culture. Indonesian nation has a variety of cultures that really need to be maintained and deve-

⁴ Jurna Petri Roszi and Mutia, "Akulturasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Lokal dan Keagamaan dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Perilaku-Perilaku Sosial," *FOKUS* 3, no. 2 (2018): 172–98.

⁵ Hamzah Junaid, "Kajian Kritis Akulturasi Islam dengan Budaya Lokal," *Diskursus Islam* 1, no. 1 (2013): 56–73.

⁶ Roszi and Mutia, "Akulturasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Lokal dan Keagamaan dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Perilaku-Perilaku Sosial."

loped, but nowadays many have been displaced by foreign cultures.

Kemranggen Village is a pluralistic community consisting of various people with diverse professions and religions. Despite the differences, village residents live harmoniously side-by-side, and this can be seen in the practice of Merti Desa tradition. Everyone was participating, working together and helping each other. The Merti Desa tradition is carried out not only aiming to maintain the cultural wealth of the community, but also to create harmony and harmony in the community.

Studies on Merti Desa has been carried out by many researchers including Suryaningsi (2019), who found that this tradition is an annual tradition carried out by Javanese transmigrants as a form of preserving their culture⁷. Widyatwati and Mahfudz (2019)⁸ added that Merta Desa tradition fosters an attitude of mutual cooperation and community concern in maintaining local traditions. Additionally, a study by Dedik Prianto, Lukman Asha and Guntur Putra Jaya (2020) mentioned that a village can grow religious and spiritual values as an expression of gratitude to God, grow social values through friendship and mutual cooperation, and grow economic values, namely providing business opportunities for residents⁹. The position of this present research is to add insight and knowledge about the Merti Desa tradition from the point of view of its influence on community harmony.

This study aims to reveal the practice of Merti Desa in Kemranggen Village in establishing community harmony. The research questions this study aimed to address are: How is Merti Desa tradition practiced in Kemranggen Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency? How does Merti Desa tradition contribute to the establishing community harmony in Kemranggen Village?

⁷ Tini Suryaningsi, "Tradisi Merti Deso Di Margolembo," *Pangadereng* 5, no. 2 (2019): 261–74.

⁸ Widyatwati and Mahfudz, "Merti Desa: The Existence Of The Tradition Of The Agrarian Community In Semarang Regency."

⁹ Dedik Prianto, Lukman Asha, and Guntur Putra Jaya, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Islam Dalam Tradisi Merti Deso Di Desa Suku Menanti Rejang Lebong, Bengkulu," *Jurnal Paedagogia* Vol 9, no. 1 (2020).

There are two concepts used in this study, namely the the concept of harmony and concept of tradition. Each of these concepts needs to be explained as a way to analyze the implementation of the Merti Desa tradition in forming community harmony in Kemranggen Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency.

First, the concept of harmony arises from the term *kerukunan* (harmony), from the word *rukun* (harmony) which is given an additional prefix ke - and the suffix -an has the meaning of a harmonious life atmosphere, the occurrence of agreements in community groups, the growth of feelings of harmony among members of community groups (unity of heart). Harmony includes elements of peace, tranquility and security in friendly relationships without quarreling. Harmony leads to unity and unity is needed to realize the goal of living together, namely working together and helping each other¹⁰.

The word ‘kerukunan’ itself has some meanings in the Dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia. it means ‘good; peace; no quarrelling; unity based on solidarity and mutual help’. In daily life, ‘kerukunan’ occurs in diverse components (of religions, race, groups) that are interacting, strengthening and supporting each other. ‘Kerukunan’ also means synchronization and harmony. Harmony implies the emergence of an atmosphere of brotherhood within the framework of differences in religion, race, ethnicity and class as well as the emergence of behaviour that indicates a sense of togetherness in the midst of differences¹¹. ‘Kerukunan’ can also be understood as an atmosphere of harmony and with no hostility and bickering between one group and another. It reflects the fabric of life between groups of different characters which can live life together while still upholding the view of mutual respect and respect for other groups,

¹⁰ Dahlia Lubis, “Mengembangkan Teologi Kerukunan Untuk Mengengah Radikalisme,” *Journal Analytica Islamica* 3, no. 1 (2014): 73–83.

¹¹ Saidurrahman and Arifinsyah, *Nalar Kerukunan: Merawat Keragaman Bangsa Mengawal NKRI*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: PT. Prenadamedia Group, 2018).

being fair and being good¹². According to Lee, ‘kerukunan’ stems from a concern for preserving a harmonious relationship with the universe and society as a basic philosophy of life¹³.

In general, harmony can be described as a warm atmosphere, peaceful, serene and no conflict. Concepts about harmony is usually related to the balance and cohesion of the community. Community could feel the absence of hate, chaos and abuse. Living harmoniously, when applied to the social life or national life includes a situation where every citizen interacts well without any disturbance or threat from another citizen.¹⁴

Inter-religious harmony is very important in the context of social, national and state life. This is because differences in religion and belief are easily ignited into potential conflicts. Therefore, efforts are needed to build harmony between religious communities continuously and continuously. Inter-religious harmony is the existence of togetherness and unity between religious communities in carrying out life side by side with attitudes and behaviors that respect and respect each other, and do not intimidate and interfere with other religious people. Thus, every individual in community groups with different religions and beliefs feels an atmosphere of peace, tranquility and mutual assistance¹⁵. Harmony between religious communities will foster a peaceful atmosphere so as to create comfort for each individual in the midst of social, national and state life.

The conditions and situations of community groups that can carry out life together despite different backgrounds, without discriminating against differences; each member of the commu-

¹² Mohammad Takdir, “Model-Model Kerukunan Umat Beragama berbasis Local Wisdom,” *Tapis: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah* 1, no. 01 (2017): 61–83.

¹³ Charlene Tan, “Creating ‘good citizens’ and maintaining religious harmony in Singapore,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 30, no. 2 (2008): 133–42.

¹⁴ Takdir, “Model-Model Kerukunan Umat Beragama Berbasis Local Wisdom.”

¹⁵ I Nyoman Yoga Segara, “Kampung Sindu: Jejak Islam Dan Situs Kerukunan Di Keramas, Gianyar, Bali,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 16, no. 2 (2018): 319.

nity is given the freedom to carry out their respective religious obligations, that is what is called harmony¹⁶.

It is important to understand that in order to create harmony in society, it is necessary to understand the differences that exist in society, both religious differences, racial and ethnic differences. Harmony with communities of different religions does not mean that followers of different religions can unite and combine several different religions into a single unit. This is because each religion has its own characteristics and teachings that are different. Basically, harmony is only a facility, means and method for establishing relationships between community members with different beliefs and religions so that they can live together so that they can achieve the goals of living together in a community group without any conflicts and strife. Harmony is needed to create a harmonious, balanced, and just life among members in a community group.

The result of achieving religious harmony in a community group or a nation is the emergence of a sense of togetherness, kinship and unity. Then, there are attitudes and actions that are responsible for maintaining this harmony in the life of society or nation and state. If it is implemented in the life of society and nation, awareness will be born that the nation, state and environment are the common property of all citizens, not belonging to one class, race or group of adherents of a religion. The integrity of the nation and state is something that must be guarded and defended and cared for together. Thus harmony is a very important thing that must continue to be built and developed for the common good. It is not a temporary interest, let alone a political one. Harmony must really be based on a sense of humaEvery individual in a community group needs harmony so that life can run in an orderly and balanced manner, so that comfort, peace and security are realized in social life.

With a calm and peaceful atmosphere, every individual from the community group is able to be creative and do activities

¹⁶ Takdir, "Model-Model Kerukunan Umat Beragama Berbasis Local Wisdom."

freely according to their wishes and expertise. This is what motivates each individual and group to continue to build and grow and create a harmonious life for the good of the present and the future¹⁷.

Every individual in a community group needs harmony so that life can run in an orderly and balanced manner, so that comfort, peace and security are realized in social life. With a calm and peaceful atmosphere, every individual from the community group is able to be creative and do activities freely according to their wishes and expertise. This is what motivates each individual and group to continue to build and grow and create a harmonious life¹⁸.

Harmony in the life of society, nation and state is certainly not only inter-religious harmony. However, harmony must continue to be fostered both between people of different religions, between people of the same religion, and between religious communities and the government. Harmony can be grown and built with mutual respect, openness to each other and also love and care for each other. Harmony has many challenges and obstacles. This is because not only differences can lead to conflict, but sometimes similarities in terms of ethnicity, race and religion can also lead to disputes. Therefore, it is necessary to build harmony and maintain its sustainability both in similarities and differences in an effort to realize national harmony and maintain the integrity of the nation and state in the present and in the future¹⁹.

The second concept is "tradition" which is a custom, the result of ideas and creations of the ancestors which has always been taught from generation to generation from one period to the next. Basically, a tradition that is carried out repeatedly and

¹⁷ Said Agil Al Munawar, *Fikih Hubungan Antar Agama*, ed. Abdul Halim (Jakarta: Ciputat Press, 2005), xv.

¹⁸ Rasimin Rasimin, "Toleransi Dan Kerukunan Umat Beragama Di Masyarakat Randuacir," *INJECT (Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication)* 1, no. 1 (2016): 112, <https://doi.org/10.18326/inject.v1i1.99-118>.

¹⁹ Mashudi, "Pendidikan Keberagamaan Sebagai Basis Kearifan Lokal (Gagasan Kerukunan Umat Beragama)," *Jurnal Tarbawi* 11, no. 1 (2014): 49.

continuously is not something that suddenly exists or is accidental. Tradition must have a background so that the tradition can occur²⁰. Meanwhile, tradition in sociological terms has the meaning of customs, habits and beliefs that are maintained consistently and continuously from the previous generation to the next generation²¹.

The word "tradition" in anthropological terms has a similar meaning to the word "custom" so that both mean habits that have been carried out repeatedly in a certain community group, are magical and religious. The form of these habitual activities can include cultural values, norms, laws and rules that form a system within a community group. Another form is a cultural conception that is rooted in the life of a community group²².

Traditions that are carried out consistently and continuously then become a characteristic of a community group, which later becomes the culture of that group. over time, tradition can shape and embody culture in a community group. Culture which is the result of a tradition in a community group manifest in three characteristics, namely (1) the form of culture is the unity of an idea, an idea, a value, a norm; (2) The form of culture is a series of activities and patterned actions of individuals from community members (activities); (3) The form of culture is the result of human creativity (artifact)²³.

Culture can be used as a measuring tool and barometer in assessing, interpreting and analyzing the progress of a community group. Therefore, the existence of culture is very urgent because it will support in researching and discussing the development of a community group. Culture is a series of ideas, creations and activities as well as human works, both physical

²⁰ Piotr Sztompka, *Sosiologi Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Grup, 2007), 69.

²¹ Soekanto, *Kamus Sosiologi* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 1993), 459.

²² Arriyono and Aminuddi Siregar, *Kamus Antropologi* (Jakarta: Akademik Pressindo, 1985), 4.

²³ Mattulada, *Kebudayaan Kemanusiaan Dan Lingkungan Hidup* (Makassar: Hasanuddin University Press, 1997), 1.

and non-physical, which are born in a community group that is produced through a learning process, both formal, non-formal and informal learning. Culture does not appear by itself in a community group, but is caused by interactions between members of community groups who support each other so as to bring up an agreement, both implied and expressed. Culture is a human effort to maintain the existence of life, because through culture humans can carry out their duties in life in this world as caliphs or leaders. Culture will give color to the form of human religious life so that humans become the identity and characteristics of humans compared to other creatures on earth²⁴.

Culture in a community group is unity and wholeness which is composed of various small elements that are interconnected between one element and another. The elements that are arranged so as to form a universal culture can be in the form of all equipment and tools used by a group of people or nations, sources of life and economy for community groups or nations, social systems and models of community structure, the language used, both spoken language, as well as written language, various models of art and culture, models of the education system in learning and systems and models of religion and belief and mythology²⁵.

Cultural elements are divided into two major parts, namely: cultural elements that are static or patent and difficult to change, and cultural elements that are elastic and easy to change due to external influences. Elements of static culture include religion or belief systems and mythology, social structure systems and education systems in acquiring knowledge. Meanwhile, cultural elements that are elastic include various models of art, language (both spoken and written), tools and equipment used in life²⁶.

Types of culture can be divided into two categories, namely small culture and big culture (little culture and big culture).

²⁴ Deden Sumpena, "Islam Dan Budaya Lokal: Kajian Terhadap Interelasi Islam Dan Budaya Sunda," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2012): 101–20.

²⁵ Sumpena.

²⁶ Sumpena.

The culture contained in community groups whose scope is small and limited is referred to as small culture or local culture. Meanwhile, the culture that is followed by the majority of the community and has a wider area coverage is referred to as the big culture. The process of intertwining and meeting large cultures with small cultures allows for a process of assimilation. In this process, it is possible to marginalize a small culture because of the influence and pressure of a big culture that overpowers it²⁷. In other words, a strong big culture is able to erode and shift the existence of a small culture that is embraced by a small group of people.

Small culture/ local culture is a culture produced by the mankind since the beginning of its existence on earth. Small culture is a manifestation of human's success in maintaining their existence on earth and caring for the earth where they live. The small culture as result of predecessors' works that is preserved until now is proof that the predecessors have contributed to creating a culture to be passed on to the current generation. The existence of a small culture or local culture should continue to be maintained and preserved, otherwise it will gradually experience shifts and shrinkage due to the brunt of the big cultural wave. Very likely, a small culture is threatened with extinction and eroded by a large culture or foreign culture²⁸.

Indonesia is a nation that is very rich in traditions, culture, ethnicity, race, language and religion. Likewise, the Javanese who are in the broad scope of culture in this archipelago, also has a wealth of traditions and cultures. Among the traditions and culture that exist in the Javanese tribe is to make important events that occur in life as a sacred ceremonial event which is often referred to as a *slametan*.

Slametan is usually carried out throughout the course of human life from birth to death. *Slametan* when someone is still in the womb is called *ngapati*. It is to commemorate a baby who is

²⁷ Elma Haryani, "Akulturasi Budaya Keagamaan Di Cina Benteng Kota Tangerang," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 18, no. 2 (2020): 401.

²⁸ Sumpena, "Islam Dan Budaya Lokal: Kajian Terhadap Interelasi Islam Dan Budaya Sunda."

four months in the womb; *mitoni*, to commemorate a baby who is seven months in the womb; *wetonan* is to commemorate the birthday; *sunatan* is held when a boy is about to be circumcised, marriage is a slametan ceremony held when someone is married. As for the death, there are *slametans* called *telung dinan* (three days after death), *pasarana* (a week after death), *patangpuluhan* (forty days after death), *nyatus* (one hundred days after death) and *nyewu* (a thousand days after death)²⁹.

Slametan ceremony is also carried out in connection with religious activities in certain months, such as *Muludan* which is held in the month of maulid (Rabiul Awwal), *Saparan* which is held in the month of Safar, *Rejapan* which is held in the month of Rajab and so on. In addition, there are also slametan ceremonies held based on ancestral heritage before the influence of Islam in Java, including *ruwatan*, a ceremony held to eliminate bad luck from someone or someplace, and *sedekah bumi* or *bersih desa* which is then more familiar with the term Merti Desa.

Selametan Merti Desa is part of the variety of cultures and traditions that exist in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java. Merti Desa is a form of social activity in Indonesian society. Merti Desa activities are a legacy from the ancestors passed down from one generation to the next. The form of the Merti Desa ceremony has changed from time to time due to the influence of advances in science and technology³⁰.

The word ‘merti’ according to Endraswara stems from the word ‘pitre’ meaning: intention and or giving service to the ancestors. In addition, the word ‘petri’ also means: maintaining and caring (*memetri*). Therefore, Merti Desa means an activity

²⁹ Susanti, “Komunikasi Ritual Tradisi Tujuh Bulanan (Studi Etnografi Komunikasi Bagi Etnis Jawa Di Desa Angarungan Kec. Torgamab Kab. Labuhanbatu Selatan),” *Jurnal FISIP* 2, no. 2 (2015): 2.

³⁰ Fanny Hendro, Topan Setiawan, and Donna Setiawati, “Memperhatikan Eksistensi Tradisi Tungguk Tembakau Melalui Media Sosial,” *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 19, no. 1 (2021): 78–92.

carried out by a community group of a village whose aim is for maintaining and caring for the culture that belongs to a village.³¹

Merti Desa is a magical-spiritual ritual that serves as a wealth of Indonesia nation. The Indonesian people with various ethnicities and races have diverse traditions. One of the cultures and traditions of the Indonesian nation that is owned by the Javanese is *Merti Desa*. Javanese people like to make important life moments as a ceremonial event. Javanese people consider life-related events to be sacred and contain wisdom, so that every event that is important is always held an event called *slametan*. The form of *slametan* ceremony activities related to human life such as *ngapati*, *mitoni*, *sunatan*, *kawinan* and *kepaten*. *Slametan* ceremony activities are also held on events that occur in certain months related to religious teachings such as *maulidan* activities, *Safaran*, *Rejegan* activities, and so on. In addition, there are also *slametan* ceremonies inherited from their ancestors before the arrival of Islamic teachings, such as the *ruwatan*, *slametan*, the *Sedekah Bumi* or *Bersih Desa*, which is similar to *Merti Desa*³².

Merti Desa contains intent and purpose as a means of expressing gratitude for the grace and gifts of the Creator, a means of praying for safety and protection from all harm to the Creator and sending the spirits of the ancestors by praying together and giving charity. This can be seen from the many series of activities in the *Merti Desa* event which shows an expression of gratitude and sends spirits through joint prayer. *Merti Desa* activities which are part of the rich culture and traditions of the Indonesian people carried out by the Javanese

³¹ Amalia Septi Puspitasari, "Kajian Folklor Tradisi Merti Dusun Di Dusun Tugono Desa Kaligono Kec. Kaligesing Kab. Purworejo," *ADITYA - Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Jawa* 1, no. 1 (2012).

³² Ulul Aedi, "Ritual Merti Desa Sebagai Media Dakwah Di Desa Tawang Kecamatan Susukan Kabupaten Semarang" (Uin Walisongo Semarang, 2018), 55.

are usually held once a year, but in some areas it can be different³³.

The practice of Merti Desa tradition from one region to another can have different forms of activities. The difference can be seen from the frequency of activities and the size of the ceremony. There are regions that carry out Merti Desa once a year, while others do it every two years and some others do it every three years. The size of Merti Desa activities can also vary according to their respective regions. Some carried out Merti Desa in a simple way, namely with each villager bringing an *ambeng* and then collecting it at the dusun hall. After praying together, then everyone could enjoy the meals together. use then praying together followed by eating together. A variety of activities ranging from making *ambeng*, carnival around the village then praying and eating together and followed by entertainment performances such as horse braids, *jatilan*, *lengger*, *tayub* and shadow puppets.

The naming of the Merti Desa tradition from one region to another is different even though it has the same goal. This activity has many names including Merti Desa, Sedekah Bumi, ruwatan, Merti Dhusun and Bersih Desa with the same intent and purpose, namely as a means of expressing gratitude for the grace and gifts of the Creator, and as a means of praying for safety and protection from all harm³⁴.

Merti Desa is one of the rituals which is a culture and tradition that exists in Indonesia from the Javanese tribal community. Actually, there are many traditions that exist in Javanese society which are used as attitudes and views that are imbued as a form of belief and religion³⁵. This behavior of the Javanese

³³ Mufti Riyani et al., “Pemanfaatan Foklor Asal Usul Kota Langsa Sebagai Media Pendidikan Perdamaian,” in *Seminar Nasional Peningkatan Mutu Pendidikan*, vol. 1, 2020, 24–32.

³⁴ Najib Luqman and Syamsul Bakri, “Sintetik Mistik Dalam Multi-religiusitas Masyarakat Selo (Studi Kasus Tradisi Saparan Di Dusun Selo, Kelurahan Selo, Kabupaten Boyolali)” (IAIN Surakarta, 2021).

³⁵ Heri Kuswanto, Ricy Fatkhurrokhman, and Khoirul Anam, “Makna Relijius Dalam Ritual Adat Masyarakat Pesisir Kabupaten Gunungkidul,” *Ulumuddin: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (2021): 13–28.

people cannot be separated from the belief that carrying out religious orders combined with tradition is good and suitable for Javanese society. Thus, carrying out religious teachings framed in tradition is a form of harmony between humans and the universe and at the same time the relationship between humans and the Creator³⁶.

Merti Desa tradition continues to be maintained and preserved because it is believed to have functions including: 1) maintaining and preserving the remains of the ancestors that have been passed down from generation to generation, so that practicing the Merti Desa tradition is a form of filial piety to the ancestors, 2) as legitimacy for the life view of community groups as well as as a belief and carrying out social institutions that are already running, 3) as a symbol of the identity of a community group or nation and state, 4) being a point of return when experiencing despair and boredom from the hustle and bustle of the world³⁷.

This research is a field research with a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative descriptive method is a research process to produce descriptive data obtained directly from the research location field as it is without adding and subtracting the actual facts in the form of writing or expressions of the research object³⁸. This method aims to fully describe the practice of the Merti Desa tradition in forming community harmony in Kemranggen Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency.

This research was conducted in Kemranggen Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency, Central Java Province. This research was conducted from January to March 2021. The informants of this research were all parties involved and witnessed the

³⁶ Felix Brilyandio, "Orang Jawa Menjaga Keharmonisan (Tinjauan Filsafat Moral Kant Dalam Upacara Tradisional Nyadran)," in *Forum*, vol. 50, 2021, 34–49.

³⁷ Aedi, "Ritual Merti Desa Sebagai Media Dakwah di Desa Tawang Kecamatan Susukan Kabupaten Semarang," 56.

³⁸ Lexy J Moelong, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2007), 6.

events of Merti Desa activities in Kemranggen Village which consisted of village officials, community leaders and villagers.

This research data collection was carried out using direct observation at the location and research subjects, interviews (excavating information from informants by asking key questions) and documentation (checking documents at research locations that support the research). Data analysis was carried out through four stages, namely: data documentation (collection of research data), data reduction (selection of important data), data presentation (displaying selected ones), and finally drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History and Practice of Merti Desa

The practice of Merti Desa in Kemranggen Village, Bruno Subdistrict, Purworejo Regency has been running since long time ago, and was carried out by the ancestors which was then inherited until now. The community leaders explained that the initial process and the formation of this tradition were closely related to the history of the formation of the Kemranggen village itself.

Ki Priyo Widodo, a community leader as well as the *dalang* of *wayang kulit*, said that the establishment of Kemranggen village started from the figures who had fought and revived the areas in the Kemranggen village area. The origin of the name Kemranggen comes from the names of the figures who first built dusuns in the Kemranggen village. These names include Kyai Mranggi, the establisher of Krajan hamlet, Kyai Mandung, the establisher of Dusun Lokabaya (now Dusun Sawah Lor), Kyai Gablog the establisher of Dusun Gablogan, Kyai Jembrok the establisher of dusun Prupitan (now Dusun Kali Gadung), Kyai Braja Lumut the establisher of Balakan village. Along with the the passage of time, as well as the increasing number of residents of these dusuns it was deemed necessary to establish a closer relationship among others. After the deliberation was held, then they agreed on a decision that these dusuns be merged into one village under the name Kemranggen. This

was decided based on the consideration that the name Kemranggen was taken from the name of Kyai Mranggi who has a wider dusun area and larger population compared to other dusuns. It was also due to the consideration that Kyai Mranggi had come and built dusun in a new area as opposed to clearing preexisted dusuns.

The first village head/Lurah of Kemranggen village was Kyai Ragantaka with the center of government in Dusun Simandung. The names of Kemranggen leaders from time to time are: (1) Kyai Udantaka I, (2) Kyai Ketantaka, (3) Kyai Udantaka II, (4) Ki Mangku Pawira, (5) Ki Krama Pawira, (6) Ki Rana Taruna, (7) Ki Karta Pawira, (8) Ki Sudomo, (9) Nyi Hartati, (10) Ki Pargono, (11) Ki Sabdo and the current one is (12) Ki Pargono. During the leadership of Kyai Udantaka I to Kyai Ketantaka, the center of government was still in the Lokabaya Simandung area. Then since the leadership of Kyai Udantaka II, who is the third leader, the center of government is in the Dusun Kemranggen so that the Dusun Kemranggen has become the center of the Kemranggen village government until now³⁹

From this explanation, it can be understood that Kemranggen village consists of smaller *dusuns* in the Kemranggen village area: namely Dusun Krajan, Dusun Sawah, Dusun Gablogan, Dusun Kali Gadung and Dusun Balakan. The name Kemranggen comes from the name of a prominent figure, namely Kyai Mranggi, the pioneer of Dusun Krajan which has the largest area and largest population.

The residents of Kemranggen Village are diverse in terms of professions and religions, as shown in the following tables:

Table 1.
Demography by occupations

No	Occupations	Male	Female	Total
1	Unemployed	164	103	267

³⁹ Interview with Pargono on 3 February 2021

No	Occupations	Male	Female	Total
2	Stay-at-home parents	1	116	117
3	Students	60	67	127
4	Retired	11	2	13
5	Civil servant	8	5	13
6	Armies	3	0	3
7	Merchants	1		1
8	Faremers	239	234	163

Source: Demography by occupations⁴⁰

Religions held by the people of Kemranggen are diverse as presented in the table 2 below:

Table 2.
Populations by religion

No	Religion	Population
1	Islam	1122
2	Protestant	7
3	Catholics	21
4	Hinduism	1
5	Buddhism	-
	Total	1151

Source: Demography by religions⁴¹

Table 1 shows the types of occupations that villagers of Kemranggen have. It indicates that most of the villagers are farmers and second biggest group of population is unemployed. Civil servants and armies are favorite occupations in the village, given that these professions provide fixed income and pension fund. Additionally, Table 2 portrays various religions in Kemranggen, naely: Islam, Christianity, Catholics dan Hinduism.

The history of Merti Desa in Kemranggen Village has experienced a long dynamic. The origin of the practice of the

⁴⁰ Desa Kemranggen, “Demografi Berdasar Pekerjaan,” [www.desakemranggen.com](http://desakemranggen.com), 2021, <http://desakemranggen.com/first/statistik/1>.

⁴¹ Desa Kemranggen, “Demografi Berdasar Agama,” [www.desakemranggen.com](http://desakemranggen.com), 2021, <http://desakemranggen.com/first/statistik/3>.

Merti Desa tradition is gratitude to the creator who has provided abundant produce in Kemranggen village. At that time, the population's economy was still relatively simple, so they only relied on agricultural products. *Ambeng* was still very simple with the contents of food according to the ability of residents. After the residents of Kemranggen village built their village facilities such as village halls, village roads, irrigation canals and so on, gradually the economy of the population also increased. Merti Desa activities are increasingly developing into the luxury it is today. From time to time, the times have progressed, and the lives of the Kemranggen people have become more organized, and the people have started to improve their economy and are aware of the importance of offering gratitude and praying together which are framed in the Merti Desa tradition⁴².

Merti Desa has been celebrated in Kemranggen village since the leadership of Kyai Udantaka II as a form of gratitude for the blessings and gifts given by the creator in the form of *rizqi* (i.e. abundance of agricultural products in Kemranggen village), and at the same time as a means of embodiment of prayer so that Kemranggen village is safe from all harm, so that people live a safe, peaceful and harmonious life. When it was first held, the implementation of Merti Desa was still very simple, only by gathering and eating together in the village field with food that was brought individually and then collected and eaten together.

Merti Desa ritual in Kemranggen village was initially carried out every year in a simple manner, but with the passage of time, by consideration that the event could be more lively and well-attended, then the event is held every three years.

Pargono explained that Merti Desa activities are currently held every three years to make it more lively and can be carried out optimally. In the early days of Merti Desa activities in Kemranggen village, it was carried out once a year in a very simple form of activity, with simple facilities and infrastructure, not many *ambengpun*. *Ambeng* is made from a variety of ready-

⁴² Interview with Pargono on 06 February 2021

to-eat cooked foods such as rice, vegetables, ingkung, chicken meat, jenang, sticky rice and others and from raw foodstuffs taken from gardens or fields including palawija such as long beans, corn., cassava, jackfruit, durian and others. The very limited circumstances at that time resulted in the implementation of Merti Desa activities being carried out very simply and the program being very minimal. The series of events at that time were only gathering in the village/village hall field, then all of them prayed together led by religious leaders, then the ambeng was eaten together by all villagers in the area. With various considerations as well as technological and economic progress of the villagers, and so that the event can be maximized, the practice of Merti Desa activities is made every three years⁴³.

Ciptadi explained that the reason for carrying out Merti Desa activities every three years was so that these activities were carried out more optimally in the preparation of facilities and infrastructure. The three-year gap also makes it possible for Merti Desa to be carried out in a more luxurious and bigger way. Currently, Merti Desa is attended by government officials including the pamong of neighboring villages, the Camat, sub-district officials, the Regent and district officials and community leaders, as well as Pesrangan, people who live outside the area but own the land in the village area⁴⁴.

Every three years, Merti Desa is held in turns between villages that are close to each other, namely Kemranggen village, Karanggedang village, Pamriyan village, Gunung Condong village, Wonosido village and Purbayan village. As for those who prepare the place, facilities and infrastructure, including consumption in these activities, it is the villagers who are taking their turn. As for the local villagers who did not receive their turn, they came voluntarily to the event without needing an invitation. All villagers, both those who were having their turn to hold the Merti Desa event or those who did not take part in the Merti Desa event procession together with great wisdom. After the event procession, the outside villagers enjoyed/surrounded

⁴³ Interview with Pargono, on 10 Februari 2021

⁴⁴ Interview with Ciptadi on 15 February 2021

the food dish in the form of ambeng provided by the organizers of the village⁴⁵.

Before Merti Desa event begins, deliberation is carried out first. At the deliberation for the implementation of Merti Desa activities in 2020, several decisions were made, namely: (1) Groups were created, each containing seven heads of families; (2) Each group is tasked with preparing one ambeng filled with various kinds of food; (3) Ambeng is collected and contested in the village field; (4) Ambeng is also filled with one ingkung free-range chicken with a total of 50 - 400 roasted chickens; (5) Preparation is carried out few days before the ceremony⁴⁶.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that the Merti Desa practice can be followed by all villagers, both those who are receiving their turn and those who are not. Rituals can also be followed by guests from figures and officials. Merti Desa activities were carried out in the village field with a formal protocol event, filled with welcoming remarks from officials and also filled with a joint prayer event. In addition, Merti Desa activities are also filled with artistic entertainment, such as: *tayuban/ tledak*, *wayang kulit/ringgit purwa*, *dolalak*, Kuda Lumping⁴⁷.

Leto Setyanto as the head of Dusun III of Dusun Gablogan, Kemranggen village states that traditions in Kemranggen village are both tradition and culture owned by the villagers and are still sustained to date.⁴⁸

Ki Priyo Widodo as one of figures in Kemranggen Village explains that *Merti Desa* begins with *kirab* budaya (cultural parade) with tumpeng and chicken as the main dish. In this *kirab*, the members are dressed in Javanese full custom, to impersonate past leaders of Kemranggen village from time to time. Gamelan/gending music follows this kirab. One of the kirab members, visualizing the leader of Kemranggen in the past, then gives the tumpeng and chicken to Ki Lurah (current head of village) as a gratitude symbol for the current leader for keeping peaceful

⁴⁵ Interview with Ciptadi on 12 February 2021

⁴⁶ Interview with Ciptadi on 17 February 2021

⁴⁷ Interview with Jemingun on 18 February 2021

⁴⁸ Interview with Leto Setyanto on 18 Februari 2021

village life and for collaborating with the village people. It is then continued by a ceremony followed by big meals. People eat the kirab meals together, so-called *kepungan* (group eating), by sharing *ambeng* (ritual food) to all guests and villagers⁴⁹.

In short, Merti Desa consists of three main activities namely: deliberation (*musyawarah*) for preparing the ritual, followed by site preparation and cleaning. It is continued with the main ritual, and is closed with *tayub* or *wayang* performance. Each stage is discussed in the following section.

The Practice of Merti Desain Building Harmony Mewujudkan Kerukunan

Merti Desa tradition in Kemranggen Village is a legacy of the predecessors initiated Kyai Udantaka II as a form of gratitude for the blessings and gifts given by the God in the form of *rizq* i.e. the abundance of agricultural crops in Kemranggen village. and at the same time, it also means as of embodiment of prayer so that Kemranggen Village is safe from all dangers and the community lives a safe, peaceful and harmonious life.

Preparation for Merti Desa begins with community service activities to clean the village environment and also prepares the location for the Merti Desa ceremony by all villagers. Then, there is a deliberation on the division of tasks for making a meal called *ambeng*. One *ambeng* is usually made by a group consisting of an average of seven families. *Ambeng* is filled with various kinds of food, side dishes and vegetables. Later, *ambeng* from various groups will be collected in the *kelurahan*/village hall field and contested. In its development, Merti Desa experienced a significant increase in the number of *ambeng*. In the past, there was only one free-range chicken. But now there can be *ambeng* 50 - 400 roasted chickens.

From the Merti Desa preparation process, it is clear that the Merti Desa activities foster and build harmony among the Kemranggen villagers. The loyalty and sincerity of the community is very visible in their enthusiasm in preparing for the Merti

⁴⁹ Interview with Ki Priyo Widodo, 19 February 2021

Desa event. The villagers held the event very lively. They donate their produce to be enjoyed together with other residents. They also donate food to be eaten together in the ceremony and so that they can be brought home which in Javanese is called blessing. Broadly speaking, harmony means an atmosphere of brotherhood and togetherness among all people despite different ethnicities, races, religions and groups. The participation of all villagers shows a sense of brotherhood and togetherness regardless of differences in ethnicity, race, social strata and profession. This activity also serves as a means to strengthen the ties of brotherhood among the villagers.

Each member of the community has their own sense of responsibility and common goal to succeed the Merti Desa ritual. It is because this ritual is common interest, to express and to offer gratitude to the Creator for the blessing and gift He gave to the whole village. The well-woven harmony among the villagers and leaders, and the deliberation they took prior to the Merti Desa are the key factors of success.

The practice of *Merti Desa* begins with *kirab* budaya (cultural parade) with tumpeng and chicken as the main dish. In this *kirab*, the members are dressed in Javanese full custom, to impersonate past leaders of Kemranggen village from time to time. Gamelan/gending music follows this *kirab*. One of the *kirab* members, visualizing the leader of Kemranggen in the past, then gives the tumpeng and chicken to Ki Lurah (current head of village) as a gratitude symbol for the current leader for keeping peaceful village life and for collaborating with the village people. It is then continued by a ceremony followed by big meals. People eat the *kirab* meals together, so-called *keprungan* (group eating), by sharing *ambeng* (ritual food) to all guests and villagers.

Kepungan symbolizes harmony among the residents of Kemranggen village, neighboring villagers and invited guests. By eating together like this, they feel a sense of closeness, brotherhood and equality despite their professions, social status, religions and beliefs. Kemranggen village has some major professions, such as: farmers, laborers, civil servants, government officials, teachers and various other professions. This part of the

ritual also raises awareness of the importance of harmony between the community and its leaders to work hand in hand to build and prosper all Kemranggen villagers.

Merti Desa practice fosters harmony among the villagers, through the participation of all villagers to conduct the event, either by walking together in the parade, eating together in *kepungan*, or enjoying night performance as the closing of *Merti Desa* ritual. All members of the community were enthusiastic in participating in these activities. Each community member helps one another, works together and build harmony among villagers. The impersonation of past village leaders, showed a sense of togetherness, and the importance of respecting the predecessors who had fought for the prosperity of Kemranggen village. The carnival event was also accompanied by Javanese gamelan music indicating a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere in the hearts of all villagers and took into account the religious differences of the villagers.

Wayang performance by *dalang* (puppeteer), *dolalak* and *Kuda Lumping* that accompany the *Merti Desa* are means for building and fostering harmony. All villagers of Kemranggen Karanggedang, Pamriyan, Gunung Condong, Wonosido and Purbayan gather together to enjoy the performances. This further strengthens the sense of brotherhood and togetherness among community member by taking into account their respective differences, both differences in professional backgrounds as well as differences in religions and beliefs.

Tayub performance concludes the entire series of *Merti Desa* ritual in Kemranggen village which is held in the evening. Villagers enthusiastically flock to watch the entertainment after previously working hard together to carry out the entire series of *Merti Desa* activities. *Tayub* entertainment unites people together, symbolizing the solidarity and togetherness.

The *Merti Desa* tradition in Kemranggen village is part of the traditions and culture of the Indonesian nation. The existence of *Merti Desa* tradition has been going on for a very long time, and it is an attached element of Kemranggen village community. *Merti Desa* tradition is not only a magical-spiritual attitude of the community, but also cultural expression of Kemranggen village

community group in particular and the Indonesian nation in general.

CONCLUSION

Merti Desa is one of the traditions of Indonesia originating from the Javanese culture. *Merti Desa* tradition in Kemranggen Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency began to be held since the leadership of the village government was held by the head of Kyai Udantaka II. The ritual signifies an expression of gratitude for the blessings and gifts (*rizq* – provision) in the form of abundance of agricultural products. It also means as an embodiment prayer asking the God will give the community with security, peace and harmony in life. *Merti Desa* activities in Kemranggen village began with preparations, namely village residents' consultations, then continued with the preparation of facilities and infrastructure and venues for holding activities, then the main event consisted of cultural carnival, ceremonial events, siege and various entertainment. The entire series of *Merti Desa* activities in Kemranggen Village establishes the harmony of the Kemranggen village community through participation, cooperation and mutual assistance all village communities regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, social strata and profession.

This research is limited to the implementation of the *merti desa* tradition in realizing harmony. Further studies could explore this tradition from various perspectives.

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