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## **THE SUROAN TRADITION OF THE JAVANESE MIGRANT COMMUNITY: A CASE OF HESSA PERLOMPONGAN VILLAGE AIR BATU DISTRICT ASAHAN REGENCY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to determine and analyze: 1) The implementation of the Suroan Tradition of the Javanese Migrant Community in HessaPerlompongan Village, Dusun IV, 2) The Meaning of Suroan of the Javanese Migrants in HessaPerlompongan Village, Dusun IV. This study applied a qualitative method, where the research was carried out on the Javanese Migrant Community in HessaPerlompongan Village, Dusun IV, Air Batu District Asahan Regency. The data validity was guaranteed by detailed observation and data triangulation. The results show that: 1). The Javanese migrant community in hamlet IV HessaPerlompongan did not abandon the Javanese tradition that was brought by their ancestors 2). The implementation of the Suroan in Hamlet IV HessaPerlompongan usually coincides with the 1st of Suromonth, marked by two series of activities: Genduri and The Kuda Lumpung Show (JarangKepang) 3). The Javanese migrants in hamlet IV interpret one Suro night or throughout the Suro month as well as: a month that is required to be eling (remember) and alert, interpreting the Suro month as a month full of calamities so that in this month the Javanese people are not allowed to build houses, hold for events such as weddings, circumcision parties, and others. Javanese people in hamlet IV interpret the Suro month as a form of respect for their previous ancestors' spirits and as a month full of fear and, like spirits, continue to appear. In this case, the Javanese Migrant Community in HessaPerlompongan Village, Dusun IV, Air Batu District, Asahan Regency should continue to preserve the customs, habits, and traditions of their ancestors and pass them on to future generations (children and grandchildren) so that these traditions do not become extinct and remain sustainable.*

Keyword: *Community, Javanese Migrants, tradition, Suroan*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation consisting of various ethnic groups spread throughout Indonesia and has existed for hundreds of years, even thousands of years ago.<sup>i</sup> Each of these ethnic groups has a different tradition from one another. One of the ethnic groups of Indonesia is the Javanese. As for the characteristics possessed by the tribe, on the one hand, there are still some that are maintained by the community and have not changed at all. One of the traditions maintained by the Javanese tribe, especially in HessaPerlompongan Village is the Suroan month.

The Javanese tribe is a tribe known for its various rituals. There are many kinds of things done by the Javanese people for various rituals. One of them is the Suro month ritual or so-called Suroan.<sup>ii</sup>

This Suro month ritual is performed once a year.<sup>iii</sup> The Javanese carry out Suroan to avoid unwanted things, such as disasters, bad luck, calamity, or a myth that is still believed to be that if the Suro month, there are many traffic accidents and eventually death. If there is a taboo in the Suro month, it must be obeyed so that unwanted things do not occur.<sup>iv</sup> In this Suromonth, the Javanese tradition does not hold celebrations such as weddings, circumcisions, and building houses.

Every region with the majority of Java has a ritual or tradition to welcome this Suro month. The Javanese community in HessaPerlompongan Village welcomed the Suro month by holding a Kuda Lumpingshow which was watched by the Javanese community at HessaPerlompongan Village. This annual routine activity is a form of expression of gratitude with artistic activities. This art performance is presented by male, female, and child dancers and masks' performances and Reog to add the excitement of the show. The attractions carried out by the Javanese people in HessaPerlompongan village are also entertainment for the people who have been working and preserving the traditional art of Kuda Lumping.<sup>v</sup> Muharram month is a sacred month for Muslims, so it is a good month for self-evaluation and strengthening gratitude

to Allah SWT. The first day of Muharram is the start of a new year in the Hijri calendar system.<sup>vi</sup> Among the majority of Javanese people who are also Muslim and use the Hijri calendar system, they also use the Javanese calendar system. The month of Muharram in the Hijri calendar system is the same as the Suro month in the Javanese calendar system, so it is an excellent month to do reflection, meditation, and introspection to get closer to Allah SWT. One Muharram or one Suro cannot be scheduled simultaneously in the previous years because the Suro month is different at every turn of the year. One Muharram or one Suro is considered more sacred, especially if it falls on Friday Legi. Javanese people view the Suro month as a good month and a month full of dangers, so various taboos and rituals are observed in that month. For example, it is prohibited to travel far from where he lives because it can cause danger to those who violate it.<sup>vii</sup>

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted using field research and qualitative data. The purpose qualitative methods characterize to understand the symptoms presented in a narrative or a story without having anything to do with numbers or statistics. With field research to explore and clarify a local wisdom tradition, the data obtained later will be in the form of words, pictures, and behavior.

The data were collected by collecting study documents or reading material books and interviews with the local community. Interviews were conducted in two ways, making structured written questions and unstructured (free) interviews which were conducted flexibly to dig more profound information. After the data is collected, the researcher will write down the whole research that the researcher did.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Overview of the Research Site

Hessa Perlompongan Village is one of the villages in Air Batu District, Asahan Regency. In Air Batu District itself, there are 12 villages including Air Genting, Air Teluk Hessa, Lake Sijabut, Hessa Air Genting, Hessa Perlompongan, Perkebunan Air Batu 1,

Perkebunan Air Batu 2, Perkebunan Pulahan, Pinanggripan, Pule Island, Sei Alim Ulu, Sijabut Teratai.

The village area is 632 HA. Hessa Perlompongan village itself is divided into 4 hamlets, namely hamlet I, Hessa Perlompongan Simpang Kawat village, hamlet II, Hessa Perlompongan Sipaku Area, hamlet III Hessa Perlompongan Bukit rejo village, and hamlet IV Hessa Perlompongan village. And the researcher lives right in hamlet IV, and hamlet IV is the center of the four hamlets because the village office is there.

Hessa Perlompongan Village has the following territorial boundaries:

- 1) In the north, it is bordered by Air Genting Village, Air Batu District;
- 2) South of the border with Air Teluk Hessa Village, Air Batu District;
- 3) In the west, it is bordered by Pulau Pule Village, Air Batu District;
- 4) Eastside is the boundary with Perkebunan Suka Raja Village, Simpang Empat District;

The majority of residents in HessaPerlompongan village, especially in hamlet IV, are Muslims. In the HessaPerlompongan village, hamlet IV, most people are Javanese, although some are Batak, Malay and others. In every hamlet of HessaPerlompongan village, there are always worship places such as Masjid and Mushollah (prayer rooms).

The socio-cultural and diversity activities in HessaPerlompongan Village are still very close to Islam, such as Zikir Akbar, commemorating IsraMiraj, commemorating MaulidNabi (the Prophet' Muhammad's Birthday). In the event, there is community togetherness working together to make the event successful. Whereas in Hamlet IV itself, once a month or every Wednesday night, there is always a recitation at the Taqwa Masjid and invites the ustadz (Islamic cleric) to give a lecture. With this recitation, both women and men, there is a strong friendship among the community. Many benefits can be taken, such as learning religious knowledge together, and the relationship of friendship is also solid. As for every Friday night, there are Wirit for gentlemen, and on Friday afternoons, there is a recitation for women.

However, in terms of socio-culture, such as the implementation of the community traditions of the Hamlet IV inHessaPerlomponganvillage, they did not leave the Javanese traditions brought by their ancestors, their traditions such as Suroan, and other socio-cultural activities, namely cooperation to clean up hamlet IV offHessaPerlompongan village. viii

## 2. Implementation of the Suroan Tradition of the Javanese Migrant Community in Hessa Perlompongan Village, Dusun IV

The implementation of the Javanese Suroan tradition in hamlet IV has several activities held annually in the Suro month. Individuals can carry out Suroan in this hamlet. However, it is also routinely carried out individually every year in this hamlet and carries out several activities together. Every implementation carried out by the community participates in the activities to be held.

Before the Suro month came, several villagers from Hamlet IV gathered to discuss the committee for this Suroan event. Gathering in deliberations is not only done once, even two or three times to decide on an excellent final result for all the events or activities to be carried out. The Javanese people formed a committee for this activity. In deliberations and annually carried out by the Javanese people in this hamlet, they are Gendurian and perceive that JarangKeping are a Javanese people's entertainment. JarangKeping also bring magical and mystical things. Every activity carried out by the Javanese community in hamlet IV cites dues to the Javanese who are here, the dues given by the community are sincere, and there is no coercion. Do not forget to also ask for contribution from several restaurants or someone who has an extensive business from the Javanese people of this Hamlet IV and other hamlets. Help each other to achieve the activity objectives that have been designed. The Suroan committee, who collects contribution from the house to house and after it has been collected, will be counted together and determined for a joint Genduri event and considers that it is rare to have JarangKeping from well-known JarangKeping groups in Asahan or other hamlet owners.

The activities are not carried out precisely at one Suro, due to several obstacles such as the workers cannot join the Gendurian, other obstacles such as JarangKepang groups which sometimes cannot come if the schedule has been determined because other people have hired them. The Javanese people in this hamlet are in deliberations looking for a day off from work, and the group rarely has JarangKepang ordered since a few days ago so that it can run well.

If the right day is got, then the event is held, the Javanese people do not carry out the activity exactly on one Suro, but it is still carried out throughout the month. There are only two activities carried out, namely Genduri and JarangKepang. Activities among them are:

a. Genduri

The Javanese people in HessaPerlompongan Village, hamlet IV, always do Genduri or Selamatan, pray together, and eat together with the participating Javanese people. Genduri is done at night, sometimes after Maghrib prayer or Isya prayer; it is done in an open field because the guests are extremely crowded. Genduri is carried out by starting with opening speech from several parties such as the Headman who is present or the village apparatus representing the Headman, the Suroan committee and religious leaders who attend this Gendurian event.

Genduri or Selamatan is also a Javanese tradition, not only in Suroan, but also in a wedding reception, Tingkepan (celebration for seven-month-pregnant woman), Khitanan (circumcision) and other celebrations. Genduri is done by reciting tahlil prayers and other prayers to Allah SWT to ask His blessing and all good prayers at the time of the Genduri. Genduri intends to ask for forgiveness and a better life for the world, not follow a perverted path, and have a better life than the previous year. Genduri is also done to avoid spirit or unseen things that Javanese people believe, Genduri is as a repulsion from unwanted things.

After Genduri activities such as opening speech, reciting prayers, the last thing to do is to eat together with the Javanese people as a form of strengthening friendship between fellow Javanese people. If Genduri is for other

celebrations such as Tingkepan, wedding celebration, the Genduri package will be brought home instead of eating in a place like the Genduri Suroan. It is a differentiator so that there is more togetherness among the existing Javanese people. It is followed by eating together, which is carried out while the menu is served; Rendang, chicken stew, sauteed yellow noodles, sauteed green beans, crackers or Peyek as a flavor enhancer and some fruit as the dessert. All guests eat together and stay in touch with each other. After eating, the Javanese people do not go home immediately because they chat first before eating, then, they go home. (interview with BM)

For the Javanese Muslim community, spirituality as a form of devotion and sincerity of worship to Allah is partly manifested in ritual symbols that contain profound meaning. Ritual symbols are expressions or embodiments of appreciation or understanding of "Unreachable Reality" so that they become "The Very Near". With these ritual symbols, it is felt that Allah is always present and always involved, "united" within him.

The ritual symbols include Ubarampe (piranti or hardware in food form) which is served in the ritual of Selamatan, Ruwatan, and others. It is the actualization of the doer's thoughts, desires, and feelings to get closer to Allah. Attempts to approach oneself through rituals of sesedekahan (alms), Genduri, Selamatan are abstract accumulations. It is also sometimes referred to as an effort to spiritual negotiation so that all spirits that are believed to be above humans will not touch it negatively. It leads to various rituals of spiritual practice and produces many salvation ceremonies, of course, in each community group or individual's minds still have several factors that make them have to glorify Muharram month with its 10th (Asuro). Since that belief ultimately leads to resignation and piety to God, of course, this expressions of diversity cannot be justified.

b. Kuda Lumping/ Jarangkepang Show

The Javanese people in Hessa Perlompongan village, Hamlet IV call it Jarkep or Jarangkepang. This Kuda Lumping show, or what is known as Jarangkepang is held the next day at noon after the Genduri night. The Kuda Lumping is played by a group of Kuda

Lumping, which is quite famous and often hired by people, to make the Javanese people enthusiastic in watching this show. The show will be held at 14:00 WIB until at 23:00 WIB or it can be more or less than that hour. If the show plays from 14.00 WIB until 17:00 WIB, it will be continued after the Isha prayer.

The Kuda Lumping show is also mystical and invites dead spirits. The Kuda Lumping are played by male and female dancers, and even small children, accompanied by some drum music and other traditional whip instruments. Before starting the show, the dancers makeup first and wear perfume and various other tools. It is begun with a dance that swings to the right and the left accompanied by drum music and riding an artificial horse made of woven bamboo. The female dancers will dance wearing typical Javanese clothes. After the female dancers are finished, the male dancers will perform masks. Various typical Javanese masks are displayed, and one of them is called the Putu Gedruk mask. Every mask worn is a mask that looks very scary, they dance using Javanese clothes, their two legs have a rattle which adds to the crowd when the dancer dances and is accompanied by music and songs from those guiding the way of the Kuda Lumping. In this mask performance session, the duration of time is a little longer than the first because there are two sessions of male mask performances and this performance is also eagerly awaited because the masks are unique to the Kuda Lumping audience. After the mask show, then the male dancers and female dancers or children who join dance together again as at the beginning and in this stage the dancers who have an endang who can get drunk on the Kuda Lumping will be entered by a dead spirit and will be immune to all blows, as well as broken glass. Those who are drunk with Kuda Lumping will dance around and in the middle of them, there will be a guide carrying a whip to crush the ground as a sign to summon dead spirits. After a few drunken Kuda Lumping, they will eat the flowers that have been provided and are immune to blows and broken glass.

In this Kuda Lumping drunkenness, male or female dancers will be unconscious because dead spirits have possessed them. They dance with their sharp and terrifying eyes. Some of the audiences who have endang will also be dragged along too drunk.

It also takes a little longer in a healing process, and this healing process is not haphazard. The healing process after Kuda Lumping drunkenness is also sometimes complicated, and sometimes from the Kuda Lumping drunk, there is a request such as to be held by his wife or his child. After getting drunk with Kuda Lumping, there is a subsequent stage, namely monkey drunkenness. This monkey drunk, the dancer acts like a monkey and eats bananas and others, making it funny, and immediately the sound changes; at this stage, it is eagerly awaited because it is like watching a comedy. Then, they were healed with in front of them offerings of flowers and incense, and the Kuda Lumping show ended. The Javanese people of this hamlet each year hire different Kuda Lumping groups. It is a form of preservation of Javanese culture itself and pride for the Javanese people in this village (Interview with the Suroan committee (Riky, Bagas, Andi), Mei 2020)

Folk art is one of the Indonesian nation's cultural assets that are valuable and have very noble values. These values must have meaning so that traditional arts can survive today. Philosophically, the elements contained in the Kuda Lumping show have two meanings; symbolic meaning and aesthetic meaning. The symbolic meaning is contained in the motion's presentation, namely conscious motion that symbolizes human life who always has a forward view without repeating the mistakes he has made. Besides, there are also unconscious movements in the trance scene that symbolize human life that always betrays God, or humans do not believe in God.

Property is used as a partner or friend in carrying out a movement, meaning that a human being cannot live alone without help from others. Offerings have a function as a request for permission from God and the ancestors' spirits to be given salvation, meaning that humans acknowledge that there is something more and exalted in life in this world. Makeup can change the character of a horse rider, which means that a young man must be able to place himself in the community and have the courage to defend truth and justice. Fashion symbolizes simplicity, which means that living in the world must apply the simple principle of life without exaggerating. The musical

accompaniment is in the form of a set of dance-accompaniment Gamelan that symbolizes a young man always ready to help others. Besides, there are also handlers in this Kuda Lumpingshow who are the primary regulator of the show. It has a meaning that in living life in this world, a human being must have a role model. The aesthetic value is contained in the motion, which includes balance and symmetrical movements in the Kuda Lumpingdance, and in the unconscious motion, there is every scene that always inserts the Kuda Lumpingdance movement.

The aesthetic value of makeup is in the excitement, thickness, and striking color of the makeup so that it brings out the character of a Kuda Lumpingdancer. The clothes' aesthetic value is found in the festivity of the cloth colors used so that they seem less practical. The aesthetic value of the properties is in every movement and the aesthetic value of the musical accompaniment is the suitability of the motion with gamelan music's accompaniment in slendro harmony with Sluku-SlukuBathok and WaroDoyonglyrics.xii(Interview with the Suroan committee ( Riky, Bagas, Andi), Mei 2020)

### 3. The Meaning of Suroan of Javanese Immigrant Community in HessaPerlompongan VillageHamlet IV

The Javanese community in HessaPerlompongan Village, hamlet IV, which is in the majority of people, has many traditions that are still very much preserved and upheld. Because the Javanese are the majority in this IV hamlet, they often hold traditional events in their hamlet, like Suroan, or marriage which is always thick with Javanese customs. For example, although the bride is Javanese women and the groom is Malay man, the wedding reception always haveJavanese wedding traditions. It is what the Javanese people continue to uphold. Furthermore, what the Javanese people in this village often do are Suroan or rituals held during the night of one Suro or throughout the Suro month itself.

Suroan has become a custom from the ancestors passed down from generation to generation untilnowadays. In some areas with majority of Javanese people, there must always be Suroan rituals, either individually

or in groups with the neighborhood.xiii The Javanese community in HessaPerlompongan Village also held this Suroan as a form of cultural preservation that must be preserved even though sometimes many people do not preserve it.

The Suroan, held in HessaPerlompongan Village, hamlet IV, has become an agreement rule that has been deliberated beforehand by the Javanese community, especially the parents who first know this Suroan. In the deliberations, several things were agreed upon, and the older Javanese people would act as companions or guiders so that the Suroan would run smoothly and well. The Javanese people do not want to abandon Javanese tradition, speciallySuroan, because they are afraid that unwanted thing happens because they do not preserve this custom. It is also a form of respect for the ancestors who previously carried out the Suroan tradition in the previous era.

Hearing Suroan or Suroan tradition, Javanese people often have different meanings because each Javanese community interprets the meaning of Suroan in different meanings. Javanese people interpret Suroan as a sacred month, a month full of appreciation or cleansing itself, a month that is also considered religious. However, not all Javanese people interpret Suroan as a sacred, or scary month. Because in every Javanese society, there is a difference in interpreting the Suroan.

The Javanese people in hamlet IV interpret the one-nightSuro or throughout the Suro month as a month required to be eling (remember) and be vigilant. Javanese people must remember who they are and where they are. Do not be arrogant and must guard against seductions that are misleading. Living in a world that temporarily makes Javanese people aware of their position and Suro month makes Javanese people more aware of this. Javanese people also interpret the Suro month as a sacred month. It is because people have well-established traditions with mystical or spirits. This sacred Suro month is a month filled with spirits and if one is not eling or alert, it will be affected.

The Suro month of the Javanese people in hamlet IV is interpreted as a month full of calamities because in this month the Javanese

are not allowed to build houses, hold events such as weddings, circumcision parties, and others. It is not forbidden to do it, but the Javanese people do not dare to do it because for the Javanese, this Suro month is a glorious month belonging to Allah SWT. Because this Suro month is too glorious, humans are considered weak to carry out this celebration. Javanese people interpret that if a celebration is held in the Suromonth, it will be affected or disastrous.

Javanese people in hamlet IV use the Suromonth as a form of respect for the spirits of their ancestors. Javanese people still really believe in mystical and occult things that sometimes some people do not believe in. However, that is how the Javanese people interpret it because it is a form of respect for their ancestors' spirits who have previously carried out this Suroan tradition. The Javanese people respect every existing tradition, including this Suroan, and it is continuously being developed so that it is not lost. This form of respect and appreciation is a form of love from the Javanese people for Javanese tribe which has many traditions.

As a form of gratitude to Allah SWT, the Javanese people also interpret Suroan as a form of gratitude that they bestow on Allah SWT. Because in the Suromonth, the Javanese community is getting closer to each other since several events must be held together. The Javanese people in hamlet IV are grateful for being given health, opportunities, abundant gifts and surrounded by good people at this time. With Allah's gift and health, the Javanese people of hamlet IV can continue to develop their customs, including this Suroan. It is a form of kinship between Javanese tribes who are the majority in this IV hamlet.

Interpreting the Suroan month, the Javanese people in this hamlet consider the moon full of fear and spirits continue to appear. Every night in this village seems tense because the atmosphere looks scary. It is because the Javanese consider the Suro month as a month where disasters such as traffic accidents or other accidents that cause death continue to occur. The Javanese people of this hamlet believe that most people die during the Suro month caused by accidents. Some of them think that they have an

accident because they are not being eling or alert this month.<sup>xiv</sup>

Javanese people interpret this Suroan as a form of preservation of customs that have been given and entrusted by their s ancestors. Each tribe has different beliefs and customs. Likewise, the Javanese people in hamlet IV have a Suroan tradition, so they continue to preserve and develop it. The form of Javanese society is preserved it, namely by continuing to carry out Suroan and interpreting it as how it should be interpreted.

Not everyone in this Hamlet IV participated in this Suroan tradition. Javanese people have different assumptions and interpret them differently. From the interview results with Mr. Mursidi, as one of the residents of this hamlet, the researcher got several points on how the Javanese people interpreted this Suroan. The Javanese people in hamlet IV also did not all believe in Suroan, all returned to their respective individuals and there was no compulsion to participate in this Suroan. In essence, it is to respect the spirits of ancestors who have passed away or died. Allah created man as the most perfect creature than any other creature on earth. With that perfection, humans havemind and lust. With mind and lust, humans are able to think and develop the goals and objectives to be achieved. Some of the goals and meanings of holding Suroan in Javanese society are as follows: 1) To preserve the traditions of ancestral heritage and in the context of celebrating the new year, in this case, the Javanese calendar, 2) To bring safety and peace to the Javanese people with the hope that the following year will be better than the previous year, 3) To create a sense of gratitude to Allah SWT the Almighty Creatorwho has bestowed grace and fortune on the Javanese people, 4) To develop unity, harmony, justice, and prosperity for all religious communities who carry out these traditions, without any quarrels and disputes, and mutual respect, 5) Javanese people believe that in the Suro month you must be careful and eling (remember).<sup>xv</sup>Interview with the Suroan committee ( Riky, Bagas, Andi), Mei 2020

When entering the New Year, the Javanese people still make the change of year sacred by carrying out several activities. The



20 July 1990 edition of Kompas daily newspaper explained that the traditional Javanese people viewed the Javanese calendar change having more meaning than change in other new year such as Christ or China.

Traditional Javanese people interpret the New Year celebration known as one Suro or Suroan with appreciation, concern, religion, and full of meditation. To welcome this new year, the traditional Javanese people do preparation which takes time for it. Either individually or in groups expresses their religious expressions in different ways. For example, such as white fasting, bathing in the middle of the night, meditating, making pilgrimages to the grave or the mountains, walking all night, even going around the palace walls.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. The Javanese immigrant community in Hamlet IV Hessa Perlompongan did not abandon the Javanese traditions carried by their ancestors, traditions such as Suroan, and other socio-cultural activities, namely mutual cooperation to clean up hamlet IV, Hessa Perlompongan village.
2. The implementation of the Suroan in Dusun IV Hessa Perlompongan usually does not always coincide with the 1st of Suro month, but is held to coincide with the Suro month. The implementation of the Suroan is marked by two series of activities, namely Genduri and the Kuda Lumpung Show (Jarang Kepang)
3. The Javanese Migrants in hamlet IV interpret the night of one Suro or throughout the Suro month as well as: 1) a month that is required to be eling (remember) and alert, 2) Interpret the Suro month as a month full of calamities because in this month the Javanese people are not allowed to build houses, hold events such as weddings, circumcision parties and others, 3) Javanese people in hamlet IV interpret the Suro month as a form of respect for the spirits of their ancestors, 4) Define the Suroan month as a moon full of fear and the spirits keep appearing.

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- <sup>xv</sup>Wawancara dengan panitia pelaksana Suroan ( Riky, Bagas, Andi), Mei 2020