

***Nadranan* Ritual: Cultural Values of the Agricultural and Fishermen Communities in Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia**

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ABSTRACT: *“Nadranan” is a traditional ceremony celebrated every year by the society lived in Cirebon coastal area, West Java, Indonesia. The ceremony, taken usually two days three nights in the vicinity of the Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery region, is intended to show appreciation of the Cirebon society as many of them have jobs as farmer or sailor. In their development as culture phenomenon, the “nadranan” ceremony experienced many significant changes on its practice and its perception. The most significant and subtle modification are the removal of the “Larung Sajen” ritual. The removal is unusual since, in many places, “Larung Sajen” is the main core of the “Nadranan” ceremony. The modification indicates that “Nadranan” in Cirebon coastal society is closer as a culture practice, which is accepted as a traditional heritage rather than as a ritual practice which often invites controversy. Finally, “Nadranan” is essentially a traditional ritual usually conducted by the fishermen community, although in Cirebon it is also held by the agricultural community.*

KEY WORDS: *“Nadranan”, ceremony, ritual culture, agricultural society, and fishermen community.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that comprises islands and island clusters that range from Sabang, the farthest city on the West in Aceh to Merauke on the East in Papua. The Indonesian archipelago is bordered by oceans. The marine territories of Indonesia far outsize its land territories. It is thus unsurprising if Indonesia is considered a maritime country. The seas provide potential natural resources, almost unlimited in amount. These abundant riches consist of minerals and marine biota such as coral reefs,

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fish, and other sea animals which have become part of life and living for Indonesian people who live in coastal areas, the fishermen community.

The economic lives of these fishermen are quite frugal, neither poor nor abundantly rich. Their economic situations depend mostly on the resources provided by the sea. To earn their living, the people in the coastal areas attempt to befriend the nature. A number of ways and knowledge are inherited by their ancestors, so that they may survive in their dependability on marine resources.

The condition of the nature and the sea that provides these people with numerous resources results in the self-consciousness to thank their Maker. This is evident in the people along the coast of Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia. As a form of gratefulness of their success in making a living, the coastal people of Cirebon hold a traditional ritual called *Nadranan*.

ON THE NADRANAN RITUAL

Nadranan ritual is part of the ancestral tradition still existing in Cirebon. Although a majority of Cirebon people is now Muslim, the *Nadranan* tradition is still held annually up to now. In the pre-Islamic fishermen community, the tradition is an offering to the "ruler of the sea" driven by human fears towards supernaturals within the sea. James George Frazer (1924) states that when religious people want to rule over or change the course of nature, they usually wish for the local god's blessings and assistance through their prayers. In the end, it is the personality of the god that rules the nature, their anger summons the typhoon, their blessings saves live, and their change of characters calms the raging seas.

Nadranan in Cirebon today has undergone modification in many of its aspects due to the influence of Islam and modernity. The aspects of the ritual that are considered in opposite to the monotheistic values are omitted and several processions of the ritual are given new philosophical meanings by the people who grace it. Although the old elements have been reduced, the people's enthusiasm towards *Nadranan* is still evident even today. Besides this enthusiasm, another interesting feature of *Nadranan* in Cirebon is the fact that it is not only belongs to the fishermen community, but it is also belongs to the agricultural community. Both ways of living are united in the ritual.

Based on the above explanation, the discussion on *Nadranan* comprises important points to be presented in this paper. Those points are listed as follows: (1) the procession of the *Nadranan* ritual in Cirebon; (2) the position of *Nadranan* in the context of the history of sea rituals in West Java; (3) the mainstays and the changes in the *Nadranan* ritual after

being influenced by Islamic values. The analysis in this paper tends to be descriptive-analytical, meaning that the obtained data is explained and analyzed in such a way that the meanings and relations among concepts therein may be inferred.

THE PROCESSION OF NADRANANIN CIREBON

Nadran is held for exactly three nights and two days, starting from *Kliwon* Thursday night and ending at the next Saturday night. This annual ritual is held around the Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery. Chronologically, the *Nadran* ritual consists of *Tahlil* and public prayer, folk festival that covers *Ider-ideran* (carnival), and performances of folk entertainment, and the *lelumbanan* process at the mouth of the Condong river as its closing.

First, ***Tahlilan* and Public Prayer at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery.** The recital of *tahlil* and prayers is held at the Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery. The location of the recital is not directly in front of the grave of Sunan Gunung Jati itself. According to a reliable source, the place for *tahlilan* is in the area after the third gate facing the fourth gate of the nine gates that lead to the grave of Sunan Gunung Jati on top of the Sembung hill, more popularly known as Gunung Jati.



The *tahlil* and prayers at Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery are actually held routinely every month at every *Kliwon* Thursday night led by a *Jeneng* (the head of management of Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery) and attended by Cirebon royal family, especially *Pangeran* (Prince) Patih Muhammad Kodiran from Kanoman palace. The *tahlil* and prayers are open for general public from Cirebon and other surrounding regions. In the *Nadranan*, the *tahlil* and prayers that are actually routines serve as the opening for the entire ritual that will go on for the next three days.

Tahlilan starts with the recital of *tawasul* which consists of the recital of *surah al-Fatihah* directed towards prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him), his *sahabah* (companions), *tabi'un* (disciples of *sahabah*), *tabi' al-tabi'un* (disciples of *tabi'un*), *mujtahidin* (the *ulemas* who make Islamic legal decisions), and their followers, the *awliya* (holy persons), particularly Sheik Abd al-Qodir Jailani and Sunan Gunung Jati, as well as other prominent Muslim figures both in the Middle East and in Indonesia. The *tawasul* is followed by the recital of special *aurad* or *dzikr* and recital of several verses and *surahs* from the Qur'an, namely *Al-Ikhlâs*, *Al-Falaq*, *An-Nas*, *Al-Fatihah*, *Al-Baqarah* verses 1-5, *ayat Kursi* (*Al-Baqarah*:255), and the final verse of *Al-Baqarah*. The *tahlilan* procession ends after the leader closes it with a prayer followed by the other participants. The purpose of these prayers is to beseech forgiveness, security in life and afterlife, purpose in life, and welfare among others, solemnly directed only to Allah. Along with the *tahlil*, the entire procession of *nadranan* begins.

Second, **Cirebon Mask Dance Performance**. Cirebon mask dance performance is held at the Astana Gunung Jati square and usually goes on for 10-11 hours from the end of the *tahlil* until the beginning of the next event, the carnival in the afternoon.



Salah satu degan dalam Tari Topeng

The mask dance performed at the *nadranan* is the *Pancawanda* mask dance, which consists of five different shorter dance acts, using five different masks, and five different sets of movements. The five dance acts are *Panji*, *Samba*, *Rumyang*, *Tumenggung*, and *Ruwana*.

Panji dance is a mask dance that has a very soft character. It does not contain too many movements and full of trance. This dance represents

the process of human conception and birth. The *Samba* dance or usually called *pamindo*, is a rather flirtatious, dynamic, and playful. The dance is called *pamindo* because it is performed in the second place after the *Panji* dance, as *pamindo* means second or number two. This dance symbolizes childhood, growth from infancy to teenage. The *Rumyang* dance is a dance not unlike the *pamindo*. It is as dynamic and playful, but rather filled with doubts. This dance symbolizes youth and adolescence. The following act, the *Tumenggung*, is rather dashing, authoritative, uptempo, and patriotic. This dance symbolizes adulthood, the phase after the youths/teenagers can tell what is right and what is wrong both for himself and for others. The closing *Ruwana* or *Kelana* act symbolizes bravery, anger, and greed. This act is often accompanied by laughter, giggles, and coughs from the *panjaks* (*nayaga/gamelan* players). This act represents the condition of humans when they hold absolute power.

Third, ***Ider-ideran***. *Ider-ideran* or more commonly known as *arak-arakan* (carnival) is usually held on Friday, after the Friday prayer at midday. The carnival begins at Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery and ends at the BAKORWIL (*Badan Koordinator Wilayah*) building, former Cirebon Residence building. It can be said that *ider-ideran* is the time for the people to express their artistic talents. At the carnival, they create works to be carried along the way. The works usually include *pata-pata*, *pecaro* (large papier-mache sculptures in various forms), theatricals, and others.





Ider-ideran

Pata-pata (top), Replica of *Paksi Naga Liman* (middle), and *Pecaro* (bottom)

Ider-ideran usually commences after officiated, usually, by a representative of the royal family of Kanoman Palace as the opening of the entire *ider-ideran* event and the beginning of the march for all participants. *Ider-ideran* can be officiated either directly by Pangeran Patih or by an appointed representative.

The enthusiasm of the people are demonstrated by their artistic talents, especially in performance arts, which are usually expressed during the march and are appreciated by the audience watching along the road. No less than a hundred groups perform before an enthusiastic audience that usually people 10 kms of the main road that connects Cirebon to Indramayu.



Pertunjukan Wayang

Fourth, Traditional Art Performances. The art performances are usually held at Friday night, right after *ider-ideran* ends. The performances include *wayang kulit* (leather shadow puppet) play, *wayang cepak* (wooden puppet) play, and *tarling dangdut* music show, which are usually performed all night long in several different places around Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery. These performances, which are organized involuntarily by performance art groups, add more vibe to the *Nadranan* ritual.

Fifth, *Lelumbanan*. *Lelumban* is an important part of the *Nadranan* tradition in Cirebon. *Lelumban* itself begins with sailing on a boat from the head of Condong river to Pance Jati, a place at the mouth of Condong river. *Lelumban* ritual is then held in Pancer Jati, praying together to beseech safety in life, welfare, and blessing. The prayer is led by the *Jeneng* (the head of Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery) who also leads *tahlilan* at Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery. This ritual is usually attended by the royal family of Kanoman palace led by Pangeran Patih Muhammad Kodiran. The fishermen who live along Condong river usually participate as well.

The equipment that is important for the procession this ritual is *sesajen* and *sesuguhan* (both are forms of offering) which consist of *tumpeng bekakak* (cone-shaped rice dish and whole chicken), *sega bancakan* (rice with many dishes), *tumpeng cilik* (small cone-shaped rice dish), *sabrang* (chili), *wedang pitung rupa* (seven kinds of beverages), *juada pasar* (sweet glutinous rice cake), and other traditional cookies. The offerings are not floated on the sea or left in a place, but are rather feasted upon by the participants after praying together in Pancer Jati.



The offerings (*Sesajen*) as part of *Lelumbanan*

THE POSITION OF *NADRANAN* IN THE CONTEXT OF WEST JAVA PEOPLE HISTORY

Verbal accounts on *Nadranan* have been told by Cirebon people in various versions. The first version tells that *nadranan* is initially a traditional ritual in the form of offering towards the ruler god of the sea and the goddess of rice (*Dewi Sri*) to avoid misfortunes. The second version states that *nadranan* is a form of gratefulness towards *Dewi Sri* and the ruler god of the sea who have bestowed the people with rice harvest and fish. Both versions have insufficient information to support their validity. These verbal accounts are summaries of history poorly described.

However, the first version bears partial resemblance to the *Labuh Saji* tradition in Pelabuhanratu, Sukabumi, West Java. Djuanda (2003) states that *Labuh Saji* refers to the story of a prosperous kingdom in Pelabuhanratu under a king called *Prabu Agung Danarasa*. The people of the kingdom live on fishery. They live happily and peacefully. At a certain moment, they are struck by a disaster, the number of fish they catch decreases so drastically that they begin to live in poverty. King *Prabu Agung Danarasa* who hears reports on his people's misfortune find a way to restore their peacefulness.

He discusses the matter with his advisors and the kingdom's officials. The king then meditates, praying to the Almighty to restore the condition of his people.

At that time, the people of the kingdom believes that the sea is ruled by a queen called *Nyai Dewi Loro Kidul*. The king promises to the Almighty that if his prayer is fulfilled, he and his people will present an offering to *Nyi Dewi Loro Kidul* who rules the southern sea. His wish is then fulfilled. The number of fish becomes abundant again. The king then presents an offering to *Nyai Dewi Loro Kidul* as promised, in the form of a goat sacrificed in the middle of the sea at the gulf of Pelabuhanratu. The blood and head of the goat are then drowned into the sea. Thus begins the tradition called *nadaran* or *nadran*.

Furthermore, Djuanda (2003) also states that the peaceful living and lives of the the kingdom attracts the fishermen from other regions, such as from Cirebon. In Cirebon, the offering of goat head and blood is replaced by the head of a water buffalo (*mahesa*), the usual offering in Cirebon traditions.

Unfortunately, the validity of the story cannot be confirmed to the people of Cirebon. Although so several sources in Cirebon state that in the pre-Islamic era, *larung mahesa* (buffalo sacrifice) had been commonly held but was later forsaken after the coming of Islam. Although this may or may not be connected to the *Nadranan* in Pelabuhanratu, *Nadranan* in Cirebon may be viewed as a form of primitive religious belief of the pre-Islamic society towards the ruler gods of nature. E.E. Evans-Pitchard (1937) explains that in early religious beliefs, humans depend almost entirely on nature. This dependence influences their traits and points of view.

In a primitive society, if a disease falls upon their harvest or if hunted animals are nowhere to be found, they will always solve the problems with spells and mantras, although in a very small number. This is further emphasized by Daniel L. Pals (2001). He states that human societies initially believe that spiritual beings come from forces of nature. The flow of water and the growth of trees are always connected to the spirits of nature that cause them. To prevent, avoid, and protect themselves from misfortunes, they devise rituals to appease these spirits of nature.

In the ancient beliefs, *Nadranan* is a form of ritual held intentionally by the people of Cirebon for the well-being of their lives. Fears of suffering and misfortunes in their lives to come are anticipated by presenting a certain offering to gods or ancient spirits who always watch over human lives. The offering is represented by the buffalo head sacrificed during *lelumbanan*. Along with the inception of Islam in Cirebon and the forsaking of the buffalo

head offering, the people of Cirebon's point of view on *Nadranan* has also changed, adjusting to the Islamic values.

NADRANAN IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAMIC SOCIETY IN CIREBON

Clifford Geertz (1960), in his book *The Religion of Java*, attempts to thoroughly explore the complex relation among Islam, Hinduism, and native animism. In his book, Clifford Geertz concludes that these religions influence every aspect of Javanese life. The influence is found in the symbols, ideas, rituals, and customs. According to Clifford Geertz, religion has two dimensions: the dimension of world conception and the spiritual dimension guided by moral values (Geertz, 1960).

According to Clifford Geertz's point of view, *Nadranan* may also consist of relations among several religious traditions, namely Islam, Hinduism, and animism since they are reflected in *Nadranan*. However, I do not entirely agree with this point of view. The fact that *Nadranan* consist of religious elements is true, since there are prayers recited to God as a manifestation of religious belief. However, the statement that there are complex relations of several religious traditions needs to be reviewed, so as not to say that the statement is entirely incorrect, since two or more contradicting beliefs can never get together hand-in-hand. Having faith in one belief consequently means negating the other beliefs.

To be able to observe the "inner meaning" of the *Nadranan*, like it or not, we have to separate the religious aspect from the cultural aspect. Religion covers faith, values, and teachings; while culture covers human behavior including creativity, feelings, and emotions. In certain conditions, religion may affect human thought, mentality, and behavior, but not vice versa. In any condition, human culture cannot affect religion. In other words, there are many variables that affect human culture. These variables may be shaped by their surroundings, lasting customs, and even by the revelation of a certain religion. Religion, on the other hand, is only affected by one variable only, that is the belief in the revelation of God and what is contained in said revelation. Culture may change anytime, depending on the variables that influence it. Thus so, if religion is to be discussed along with culture, it may not become a sub-system of culture since religion is above culture.

Through this perspective, a person will understand that the tangible processions of *Nadranan* are part of culture. These processions may change, be modified, and even be forsaken when a society has adopted a new perspective. This is evident in the changes happening to the *Nadranan* ritual.

First, in the pre-Islamic era, *Nadranan* is a representation of a belief towards the ruler god or spirit of the sea. This concept contradicts the monotheistic concept in Islam. Thus, the two beliefs may never be able to synthesize a new belief that accomodates both concepts, since the belief in one negates the other.

Second, as a consequence to the first point, several non-substantial aspects of *Nadranan* may be modified, replaced, omitted, or even added without a hassle. These changes may be intentionally ignited or happening automatically through a slow process. An example is the omission of buffalo head sacrifice, which is considered contradicting the new (Islamic) values, even though it is the central event of the ritual. The omission consequently affects the meaning of *larung saji* among the people of Cirebon. It is now understood that the people of Cirebon consider *larung* as the cleansing of negative traits in one's self and *mahesa* as the acronym of *Yang Maha Esa* (the One God). The *larung saji* term itself is no longer in use and is replaced by the term *lelumbanan*. The central event of the ritual, which used to be held at sea, is now held on the coast (in *Pancer Jati*, where two rivers meet). The offering, which used to be floated on the sea or left behind, is now considered more appropriate if feasted upon by the participants. Besides that, the tone of the processions have changed from solemn to merry with the addition of the performances and carnival.

Nadranan is essentially a traditional ritual usually conducted by the fishermen community, although in Cirebon it is also held by the agricultural community. These two ways of living unite to celebrate *Nadranan*. This unity is reflected in a metaphor *sega lan iwak numplek sepiring* (rice and fishes in one plate). The importance of the unity is also accommodated by the *wayang* stories commonly performed at *Nadranan*, i.e. *Budug Basu* and *Barikan*. The message of these two stories reflects the importance of being grateful for everything bestowed by God both on land and in the sea.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that:

First, the people of Cirebon believe that *Nadranan* is a very important event that needs to be held annually. The ritual is held as a form of gratefulness of the fishermen and agricultural communities to God for His blessings and gifts.

Second, the religious expression of the people of Cirebon in the *Nadranan* ritual is profound. The aspects of the previous culture that do not contradict with Islamic teachings are retained, although they can actually be omitted.

Third, the *Nadranan* is a cultural product that is developing within a society. This ritual is further enhanced by Islamic values. In its cultural aspects, *Nadranan* will keep on changing through modification, replacement, addition, or omission, yet the religious aspect will be strengthened as long as the *Nadranan* ritual is still considered important by the people of Cirebon.

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