

# The Symbolism of The *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* Tradition: Culture and Religion Integration Perspective

Afiliasi Ilafi,<sup>1\*</sup> Bani Sudardi,<sup>2</sup> Slamet Subiyantoro,<sup>2</sup> Titis Srimuda Pitana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Student of Doctoral Program in Cultural Studies at Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia;

<sup>2</sup> Lecturers of Doctoral Program in Cultural Studies at Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia.

**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the symbols in the tradition of *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* in the integration of culture and religion in commemorating the Islamic New Year in Pemalang Regency. *Banyu panguripan* literally means water of life. This tradition reflects a harmonious combination of cultural values and community beliefs correlated with the Islam adhered to. The *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* ruwat tradition exists in the Pulosari District, especially at the Manunggal Jati Utama College. This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive method in collecting data through observation, interviews, and literature related to the tradition of *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan*. This research shows that the tradition of *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* in Pulosari is not exclusively organized by the Wong Gunung Festival but also by the Manunggal Jati Utama College, which was formerly a member of the Prabasari Padepokan. The *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition aims to deliver each individual's wishes to God. In the process of *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan*, water intake comes from four directions of the compass (the west, west, south, and north). For several months, verses of the Qur'an were chanted by members of the College until, at the time of this unification, the Prophet's prayer was recited. It shows that preserving local culture is integrated with the routine of the Muslim community, specifically reading the Qur'an and praying to the Prophet in a clean and holy state.

**Keywords:** local culture, *banyu panguripan* tradition, Islamic New Year

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\*Corresponding Author: Afiliasi Ilafi (afilasiilafi60@gmail.com), Student of Doctoral Program in Cultural Studies at Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl. Ir. Sutami No. 36A Kentingan, Jebres, Surakarta, Indonesia.

## A. Introduction

In Javanese tradition, the month of Suro (Muharram in the Islamic calendar) is remarkably meaningful from other months. The month of Suro has extraordinary characteristics and deep meaning. Numerous rituals and traditional activities are held in cultural and social fields. Javanese people believe all prayers and hopes will be more readily accepted in Suro month (Arisky et al., 2024). In addition, the rituals carried out, such as pilgrimages and village cleaning, are considered a way to environment and self-purify from detrimental instances, unlocking sustenance and good fortune (Noviyana, 2021; Rifa'i & Fadhilasari, 2022). The tradition in Javanese society manifests the belief in customs and the community's response to natural and supernatural forces to comprehend the meaning contained in traditional ceremonies (Utomo et al., 2024). This complexity turns the Suro month remarkable; even so, people still assume that the month of Suro is extraordinary but treacherous. They carry out various taboos and rituals, i.e. implementing salvation, *manaqiban*, *kirab*, and heirloom *jaman*. The Suro month is also known as *a rejection of reinforcements* (A. Rahmawati, 2020; Syafa & Khoirul, 2024). Rituals are sacred activities, and their existence has been considered for a long time in Indonesian society, as well as the Javanese people, who are still preserved by generations.

The Month of Suro is associated with the history of the first month of the Javanese year. Sultan Agung, the King of Islamic Mataram, created the Javanese year arrangement. At that time, the dates of Saka (calendar system based on Hinduism) and AD (calendar system based on the Gregorian Calendar) were used based on the calculation of the sun, and the Hijriah dates (Islamic calendar system) were based on the calculation of the moon. Sultan Agung then created a Javanese date based on the month's calculation, extending the date of Saka in 1555 (Arisky et al., 2024; R. Rahmawati et al., 2023). Most of the time, rituals are performed during the month of Suro, and the Javanese people hold it on the first day of Suro. The first day of the Suro month is usually commemorated at night after the sun goes down on the previous day (the night of the first Suro) because the Javanese calendar begins at sunset from the previous day instead of midnight (Halisa et al., 2023).

Almost every region in Java has various traditions to welcome the month of Suro, for example the grebeg suran tradition, *jaman* (cleansing heirlooms) (Arisky et al., 2024), *sedekah bumi* (Arifah et al., 2024), *sedekah laut* (Sakdiyah et al., 2023) and various self-purification traditions (Nisa, 2020; Setyaningsih, 2020). In Pulosari, Pemalang Regency, Central Java has a tradition called *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan*. This tradition has a community version and a government version. Both have similar

goals but have different sprits in their implementation. The government version of the event has more profane characteristics and refers more to pragmatic forms of cultural commodification. This spirit is distinct from the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition the community holds. The sacred character is more dominant than the performance to attract tourists.

Specificaaly, Pulosari District has three perspectives on the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition: Prabasari hermitage, Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage, and the Wong Gunung Festival. Previously, the Manunggal Jati Utama College was a unit with the Prabasari hermitage, in contrast to the Wong Gunung Festival, an activity in which the committee involved elements of the government and the community in Pulosari itself. *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* is a self-purification tradition related to water as the main object (Ilafi et al., 2024). Water is taken from various spring sources, which are then buried and recited prayers and verses of the Qur'an. This tradition contains deep meaning and philosophy, combining local cultural values with the understanding of Islamic teachings believed by the local community (Ilafi et al., 2023).

This research discusses *the Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition organized by the community version. Specifically, this study analyzes the correlation between religion and local culture in a *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition case study with a research locus in Pulosari, Pemalang. This study attempts to analyze how religious values influence traditional practices. *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* not merely functions as a cleansing ritual, but also to consolidate the community's spiritual beliefs. By examining these aspects, we can better understand the role of religion in shaping cultural identity. This study also reveals how traditions adapt over time, especially in the context of modernization and social change. This study also highlights the role of *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* in building social solidarity and a sense of community. Such research contributes to a broader understanding of how tradition and religion interact to shape the norms and values held by a society.

## **B. Methods**

This research examines the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition organized by the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage. This hermitage is in Karang Sari Village, Pulosari District, Pemalang Regency. Pulosari District is a sub-district known for one of its festivals that raises the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* to preserve and develop the tradition. Research on the symbolism of the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition in the context of cultural and religious integration in celebrating the Islamic New Year

was conducted using a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the deep meaning of complex cultural practices and understand the community's perspectives regarding the ritual (Bowen, 2020; Cohen, 2013).

The data collection method was conducted through in-depth interviews with informants, namely the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage manager, community leaders, religious leaders, and ritual participants. This interview aims to reveal their views on the symbolism of water in *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* and how this tradition bridges cultural practices and religious beliefs. In addition, participatory observation was also applied, where researchers were directly involved in implementing the ritual. Through observation, researchers recorded the dynamics of social interactions and elements that support the symbolism in the ritual, such as offerings and prayers.

The data analysis method used a thematic analysis approach; namely, data obtained from interviews and observations were organized based on emerging themes. Researchers will identify patterns and relationships between water symbolism, religious values, and cultural practices. In this way, the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* procession, the integration between Javanese culture and Islamic teachings, and how these ritual builds community identity can be elaborated.

This study uses triangulation to ensure data validity, which compares information from various sources (Natow, 2020). In addition, member checking is also applied, where informants are allowed to review the results of interviews and analysis. In this way, researchers can ensure that the resulting interpretation is accurate and reflects the informant's perspective.

## C. Results and Discussion

### ***Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* at Manunggal Jati Utama Hermitage**

Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage is an association that studies spiritual and martial arts. This hermitage has been approved by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights in 2022. Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage preserves local traditional culture by teaching spiritual science and martial arts. This school also holds competitions involving members and the surrounding community. Manunggal Jati Utama Hermitage holds a specific traditional cultural art attraction called *Janturan*.

*Janturan* is a tradition or ritual to ask for safety, health, and good fortune (Paramitha Dewi I, 2021). Usually, *Janturan* is performed by holding a prayer together, reciting a mantra, or holding a thanksgiving. This tradition often involves

offerings or sacrifices placed in specific places as a form of respect for ancestors or spirits that are believed to protect them (Ilafi et al., 2023). *Janturan* can also be interpreted as an expression of gratitude and hope for a better life. This ritual is often held in daily life, such as during important events, weddings, or even when facing difficult times.

The celebration activities commemorating the night of the first suro were held at its headquarters in Karang Sari Village, which has facilities such as gamelan and sports fields. Figure 1 displays a picture of the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage.

**Figure 1**

*The Main Building of the Main Jati Manunggal Hermitage*



Source: Author Collection

Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage has other buildings, and although they both exist in Karang Sari Village, they have different facades and plans. The second building of the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*The Second Building of the Main Jati Manunggal Hermitage*



Source: Author Collection

Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage carries out activities to commemorate the Islamic New Year, including taking water from spring sources scattered from *ujungkulon* to *ujungwetan*. The place where spring water is used is oftentimes different every year, according to the direction of the elderly leaders at the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage. The water intake from spring sources uses a *lodong*. *Lodong* is a traditional Javanese woven mat, typically made from natural materials such as pandan leaves, bamboo, or other plant fibers (Setiawan et al., 2022). It is commonly used in various cultural ceremonies and daily activities, serving as a seating area during gatherings, rituals, or meals. The intricately woven patterns often reflect artistic skills passed down through generations and hold cultural significance. Mr. Sarman directly expressed information about water for the ceremony.

“The water taken from various areas is then collected in the Guci area. This turn is a village at the foot of Mount Slamet, included in the Bumijawa District, Tegal Regency, Central Java. While in Guci Village, the waters were recited Yasin and verses of the Qur'an for several months before entering the month of Suro. Towards the night of the first suro, the water from the lodong was brought to the center of the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage, which would then be counted around Karang Sari Village. The lodong containing water was carried by female members of the hermitage wearing striated clothes and white batik and dominated by parang motifs. Batik with parang motifs is one of the oldest motifs in Indonesia. The word parang comes from the Javanese language, which means pereng, which is described as curved lines resembling waves in the sea (Kristie, 2019). In 2024, the lodong carnival containing water from various springs will be implemented on Thursday, July 4, 2024.”

The tradition of the lodong carnival at the Ruwat Banyu Panguripan ceremony, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**  
*The Lodong Carnival*



Source: Karang Sari Village's Document

Another unique tradition in the series of events on the first night of Suro is *Gunungan*. It is a symbolic representation of Javanese culture, often depicted as a cone-shaped structure made of food and offerings. The *gunungan* serves as a metaphor for the universe, embodying the connection between the spiritual and the earthly (Putra et al., 2023). During rituals, it is presented to honor deities and ancestors, conveying gratitude and hopes for prosperity. As the *gunungan* is shared among participants, it fosters community and reinforces cultural values, making it a vital element of Javanese heritage and social cohesion. The *gunungan* is made from food, kitchen utensils, and school supplies. It shows a change in the view of the mountain itself, which has been identified as a mountain in the form of rice and other dishes as complements. *Gunungan* has a philosophy for the Javanese people that on the hill and the top of the mountain is a supernatural realm where the spirits of ancestors and gods reside (Hidayati et al., 2020). In the modern era, the materials for *gunungan* have been shifting and modified with functional instruments, i.e., school uniform, fruits, agricultural products, vegetables, clothing and footwear, coffee, kitchen utensils, and clothes. Examples of various *gunungan* materials can be observed in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

**Figure 4**

*Gunungan made of Agrucultural Products*



**Figure 5**

*Gunungan made of Kitchen Utensils*



Source: Karangasari Village's Document

Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage built artificial *sendangs* shaped resembles nine rows of rooms. *Sendang* is a term in Javanese culture that refers to a water source or a place that is considered sacred. Usually, a *sendang* is located in a mountainous or forest area and is often considered sacred by the local community (Fitriyani et al., 2020). Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage built *sendang mawar*, *sendang melati*,

*sendang sri rejeki, sendang kamulyan, sendang kejayaan, sendang keabadian, sendang kantil, sendang slamet, sendang cempaka, and sendang rahayu.* These *sendangs* provide visitors or hermitage members water during the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* ceremony.

Visitors take advantage of the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* by lining up first and then sitting on the chairs that members and administrators from the hermitage have provided. Visitors' eyes are dripping with *banyu panguripan* using *kantil* flowers three times in each eye. After that, visitors enter the *sendang* complex opposite a pond. Visitors were given a bucket of water mixed with jasmine flowers. This ceremony uses mixing water from seven springs. Visitors are allowed to enter the *sendang* booth, all of which have meaning and are adjusted to the wishes of each visitor. Next, visitors went to the exit and were given a bottle containing *banyu panguripan* and one gallon of *panguripan water*. Visitors are also allowed to fill in the charity boxes that have been provided.

### **Symbolization and the Meaning of the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan***

*Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* is a tradition not exclusively held in the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage but also spread in several groups. They also held the *Ruwat Banyu Penguripan*, i.e., Prabasari hermitage and the Wong Gunung Festival. The *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition at Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage implementing in several processes. The process consists of taking water from the springs of *Ujungkulon, Ujungwetan, Ujunglor, and Ujungkidul* and reciting the Qur'an verses and the Prophet's prayers. After completing this process, the water is put together in a pond. It can be taken by members, their families, and visitors outside the hermitage area who come during the Islamic New Year event. Later, the water gathered in the pond is taken and put into a bucket, which the wisher will later bring to enter the spaces called *sendang*. These *sendangs* are exclusively opened at certain times, such as during the celebration of the first Suro. Visitors can only enter the *sendang* area at the specified times, as stated by Sarman (The Manunggal Jati Utama's administrator).

"Here there are several *sendangs*, later after taking a bath you need water because the water was got recitation a few months ago in *alfatihah* in *tahlil* there will be a bottle or jerry can. It is please if you want to ask for water, but again, we must believe in Allah; do not believe in water. The water that has been put together is for safety and convenience; yes, do not forget the water, even though you have already bathed in the *sendang*. Here there are 12 *sendangs*." (Interview results on July 2, 2024)



The *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition at Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage was historically intended as an intermediary in asking and hoping for God for safety, convenience, health, beauty, and worldly nature. *The Banyu Panguripan* in this hermitage symbolizes holiness, spirituality, and life, which links humans, nature, and the creator (Ilafi et al., 2023). The sendangs in the hermitage have their philosophy for their members; as stated by Mr. Sarman.

“Melati (jasmine), so that my heart is devoted to God the Creator. Kantil symbolizes that we must obey one teacher, two alim, and third, the Supreme Creator—flower tour, dude, who is not happy with flowers. The meaning of all of us is pointing to the creator; we leave it to the creator because we have been outlined to the Almighty, so back again, the ethics of good is good, good is good, and sound is beyond goodness. That is why there are two choices; humans can choose Kenanga well; we must know especially one to the Supreme Creator; we must know who our body and soul are: father, who is conceived by mother, for 9 months and 10 days, we must know the main one. The last one we must get to know the visible and invisible brothers, Kakang Kawah Adi Ari-ari.”

The existence of *the Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* Tradition, which is carried out at the Manunggal Jati Utama College, creates a local knowledge that relates the existence of *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* to daily life is aligned with the religious teachings believed by the local community. The value that arises from integrating *the Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition with implementing the Islamic New Year includes:

#### 1. Cleaning

The water used in *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* is auspicious and sacred. It is also an intermediary in cleaning particles attached to the body or a form of spiritual cleansing (Ilafi et al., 2024). Water is the result of mixing water from various sources *from the west, north, west, and east*. Furthermore, a few days before the turn of the Islamic New Year, or in Javanese society it is called the night of first Suro. The water that has been collected and recited verses of the Qur'an is then lowered from the Guci area (Guci means an area in the Tegal regency which is located at the foot of Mount Slamet) to Karang Sari Village, Pulosari.

“The only difference is that the holy water is here if it is finished; it is direct, and even though it is still in that place every night, we send alfatihah and tahlil yasin to the places we took first. If it is not there, it is not. If it is here for a few months, we will ask for the blessing of Allah through the water. Hopefully, the water needed will be distributed to people in need. Beneficial, whose term is beneficial and blessed. May all those in need get help from Allah through the water first. So, during the bathing process, we prayed there. Pray for your

wishes and be guided. There is salvation, sustenance, and all sorts of things. If it is strong up to 11, that is fine. I always say, *kun fayakun*. That is why if it is here, *ma'am*, the bus is easy.”

The concept of self-purification in the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition holds profound significance in Javanese culture. It represents a journey of cleansing the body and soul, allowing individuals to release negative energies, past traumas, and impurities. This ritual emphasizes the importance of spiritual renewal, enabling participants to reconnect with their inner selves and the divine. Through the act of purification with holy water, individuals seek to restore balance and harmony in their lives. Practice fosters a sense of awareness and mindfulness, encouraging a deeper understanding of one's purpose and the interconnectedness of all beings within the community.

## 2. Hope

The water, hereinafter called *the water of the hungry*, represents a means of communication when making requests to God. However, we still entrust and believe that God is the one who grants this wish. *Banyu Panguripan* is mixed into places where members and administrators who are members of the hermitage are called *sendang*. The *sendangs* have names used as a place to use *panguripan water*, one of which is for bathing, as stated by Mr. Sarman.

“Bathing in the *sendang sri rejeki*, we who want to get a halal blessing fortune is an example of the picture. Continue to *sendang kamulyan* after getting a blessing from the fortune *barokah*. The goal is the same human being who asks for happiness, happiness that can be a halal blessing that is loved by the Supreme Creator.”

In the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition, hope plays a central role as participants seek blessings for a prosperous and harmonious life. This ritual embodies the collective aspirations of the community, where individuals come together to express their desires for health, safety, and success. As they engage in prayers and offerings, invoking blessings symbolizes a deep yearning for positive change and spiritual guidance. Hope becomes a unifying force, fostering connections among participants while reinforcing their faith in the divine. Through this shared experience, the tradition instills a sense of optimism, encouraging individuals to embrace the future with confidence and resilience.

## 3. Mutual Cooperation

In commemorating the turn of the Islamic New Year, or in Javanese society, it is called the night of the first Suro; hermitage members work together to carry out a series of activities. This cooperation involves jointly financing, preparing, and

carrying out various activities. Cooperation is a fundamental aspect of the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition, reflecting the spirit of togetherness within the community. As participants come together to prepare and conduct the ritual, they share responsibilities, resources, and efforts, fostering a sense of solidarity. This collaboration strengthens social bonds and emphasizes the importance of collective well-being. Individuals reinforce their commitment to one another by working together, ensuring everyone benefits from the blessings sought during the ceremony. This spirit of cooperation cultivates a harmonious environment, reminding participants that unity and support are vital for overcoming challenges and achieving common goals (Ilafi et al., 2024).

Cooperation is a cornerstone of the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition, embodying the essence of community life in Javanese culture. As members gather for the ritual, the spirit of collaboration becomes palpable as everyone contributes to the preparation and execution of the ceremony. This shared effort fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens the bonds among participants, emphasizing that individual well-being is intertwined with the collective. Through acts of cooperation—whether in gathering offerings, preparing the venue, or participating in prayers—community members reinforce their commitment to one another, highlighting the importance of support and unity in facing life's challenges (Noviyana, 2021; Setiawan et al., 2022).

Moreover, this tradition reminds participants that shared blessings and prosperity are most meaningful. The cooperation seen in *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* enriches the ritual and cultivates an enduring sense of togetherness, ensuring that teamwork and communal spirit are passed down through generations.

### **Analysis of Values in the *Banyu Panguripan* Tradition**

Tradition reflects the peculiarities of an area, which is often associated with a belief or religion of the region itself. Tradition has a meaning that is considered sacred to the local community (Aminudin et al., 2023). Therefore, traditions such as the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition at the Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage are part of the ceremony. Manunggal Jati Utama hermitage carries out the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition with other events held once a year, coinciding with the turn of the Islamic New Year.

Islam justifies the implementation of traditions if they do not cause disobedience and can be used as a method of da'wah. Da'wah determining the existence and development of society because da'wah is one of the efforts to disseminate

information and transform cultural values from all aspects to the next generation (Saputro et al., 2024). It creates complexity in the cultural values and teachings of Islam. The complexity of Islamic cultural values and teachings in implementing the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition reflects the combination of local culture with religious beliefs embraced by the local community. In the Islamic context, this tradition in this university emphasizes the importance of water as a symbol of purification and a symbol of community life itself.

In Islamic teachings, water has an important meaning and role, as before carrying out prayers, purification rituals, namely ablution, are required. As in Surah Al-Maidah verse 6, Allah says:

“O you who believe, when you stand up to perform the prayer, wash your face and hands up to your elbows and wipe your head and feet up to your ankles. If you are in a state of junub, take a bath. If you are sick, on your way, returning from a toilet (toilet), or touching a woman, and then do not get water, do it with good dust nine holy); Wipe your face and your hands with it. God does not want to make you difficult, but He wants to cleanse and perfect His favor so that you may be grateful.”

As for the local cultural values, the *Banyu Panguripan* tradition, which is also a tradition that uses water as its object, includes elements such as the existence of hopes or requests from individuals who offer their wishes, such as prosperity, safety, health, or blessings that are expected through the intermediary of the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* itself.

## **D. Conclusion**

The symbolism of the *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition initiated and preserved when celebrating the Islamic New Year in Pemalang Regency shows the dynamic relationship between culture and religion in Javanese society. The *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* tradition is not simply a routine tradition that is interconnected and related to the identity and sustainability of culture and religion in the lives of the community, especially the locals.

*Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* is a traditional Javanese ritual aimed at purification and blessing, often held to seek protection and prosperity. This ceremony typically involves the use of water, symbolizing life and renewal. Participants gather to offer prayers, and the ritual leader conducts blessings using holy water. The event may include offerings of various foods and flowers, emphasizing gratitude to ancestors and deities. As the ritual unfolds, the community comes together, fostering a sense

of unity and shared purpose. *Ruwat Banyu Panguripan* serves as spiritual cleansing and strengthens cultural bonds within the community.

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