

# MARO TRADITION IN BANYUMAS COMMUNITY

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the *Maro* tradition of Banyumas community, whose existence is endangered by the modernization. *Maro* is a tradition dealing with agriculture profit share between a landowner and the cultivators by dividing the harvest into two equal parts, half is for the landowner, and the other half is for the cultivator. *Maro* is commonly applied for dividing the net profit, i.e. the amount of harvest minus the expenses of plantation processes. This tradition enables the low social-economy class to survive as they get the fair benefit for their efforts. The data of this research were collected through interviewing the people engaged in the *Maro* tradition as well as literary studies from previous researches related to the topic. This research finds that *maro* tradition in Banyumas has been popular since the arrival of *tarekat* in this region. The lands owned by *kyai* were rented to the cultivators whose payment is given in the form of profit-sharing, called *Maro*. With such a system, the profit is shared fairly to the cultivators who have done a lot of effort in producing rice. This system meets Islamic values, which emphasize profit sharing based on efforts and work performances. The landowners give freedom to the cultivators, and the net harvest obtained is divided equally between the two parties. *Maro* system, which was carried out with an oral contract, is considered not to burden the cultivators because of the clear counting system and easy procedures. Social solidarity is also formed in this tradition, it employs people to help the planting and harvesting process, called *sambatan*.

**Keywords:** tradition, *maro*, Banyumas, agriculture, Islam

**Abstrak:** tulisan ini berusaha untuk mengkaji tentang adanya tradisi *maro* dari hasil bertani pada masyarakat Banyumas yang sudah mulai hilang akibat modernisasi. Tradisi *maro* lazimnya dilakukan pada bagi hasil atas

garapan sawah setelah panen dan dipotong ongkos produksi. Tradisi ini mampu menghidupkan ekonomi masyarakat kalangan bawah dalam menggarap lahan dengan upah yang sebanding dengan usaha. Metode pemerolehan data dalam penelitian ini dilakukan dengan wawancara kepada para pelaku, pengumpulan dokumen berupa jurnal maupun penelitian yang pernah dilakukan. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa tradisi *maro* di Banyumas mulai populer semenjak masuknya tarekat di Banyumas. Lahan-lahan yang dimiliki oleh para kiai disewakan kepada para penggarap dengan upah *maro*, atau bagi hasil. *Maro* berasal dari kata *separo* yang berarti sebagian milik penggarap dan sebagian milik dari pemilik lahan. Dengan pola semacam ini, ada keadilan pada orang-orang yang menggarap lahan melalui usaha yang keras dan mendapatkan hasil yang maksimal. Sistem ini sejalan dengan ajaran Islam yang menekankan pola bagi hasil dari usaha maupun kerja yang dilakukan. Para pemilik tanah memberikan kebebasan kepada penggarap tanah dengan hasil yang dibagi rata setelah dipotong ongkos produksi sampai panen. Sistem *maro* dirasa tidak memberatkan penggarap karena sistem hitungan yang jelas. Sistem *maro* di Banyumas dilakukan dengan akad lisan karena dirasa tidak memberatkan penggarap karena sistem hitungan yang jelas dan prosedur yang mudah dilakukan. Solidaritas sosial terbentuk dalam *maro* dengan adanya *sambatan* untuk menanam dan memanen tanaman padi.

**Kata Kunci:** Tradisi, Maro, Banyumas, Pertanian, Islam

## A. INTRODUCTION

Historically, Banyumas inherited the power of two great kingdoms in Java, i.e. Majapahit and Padjadjaran. This fact can be identified from the language used by Banyumas people, representing the language of Middle Java, which is originated from Kawi language and enriched with other languages influences. Geographically, this region was a transition between Sunda and Yogyakarta, and it makes this region - which many experts call Javanese subculture - has high values and the philosophy. Accordingly, Banyumas has many historical Javanese values with many varieties implemented in the community's routines and traditions, and they form the articulation of Javanese culture.

In the cultural hierarchy, Banyumas has a distinction and uniqueness in cultural expression. This is because of its geographical position and the ten-

dency of the people to conserve any kind of matters considered to be high value. One of the distinct tradition applied by Banyumas people is an agricultural tradition, which is called *maro*. Literally, the term *maro* is originated from Javanese word *loro*, meaning two (2). *Maro* is the verb form, which means dividing into two equal parts. Practically, this term refers to the practice of sharing by which the agriculture harvest is divided into two equal parts; one part is for the the farmer, and the other part is for the workers. The similar practice is also applied in the production of palm sugar, which includes two parties, i.e. the owner of coconut trees and the person(s) in charge of the production (in Javanese language called *tukang deres*). Such a practice has been applied for ages and can still be found in many areas in Bnayumas Regency, and is most frequently practiced in the rice plantation and palm sugar production.

In relation to such practice, it can be seen that the unique tradition in running such economic activities in Banyumas is in line with Islamic values because it give benefits to both parties, i.e. the land owner and the cultivator. Economic welfare exists in the society because of the increased productivity and job vacancies as a result of such practice. In fact, this kind of profit sharing as found in Banyumas *maro* tradition is in line with the Quran, i.e. Surah Al Muzammil 20. However, only few people realize that *maro* tradition has been implied in and suggested by the holy book of Muslims, the Quran. People of Banyumas understand that *maro* tradition gives benefits to both parties and there is no one engaging in this practice feels in lost. This is because there has been an agreement between them, or even a convention in the community. Since for a long time this practice is repeatedly conducted, it now has been a convention and tradition which no longer needs a written agreement.

Unfortunately, the globalization and fast rapid development of information and technology as well as the social deviation has endangered this tradition, which has been one of the local wisdom of Banyumas Regency. For that reason, efforts to conserve such a tradition is really needed to make it an identity of Banyumas' noble culture, which represents the complexity and flexibility able to be accepted by all social elements. Furthermore, the efforts to uncover the noble values of *maro* tradition is a must because nowadays many people tend to ignore Banyumas culture which goes in line with Islamic values. The success of this efforts will lead to the findings of valuable

knowledge for the society, and can be a discourse and practice based on noble philosophical dimension of the sociocultural heritage. Such a model of profit sharing in *maro* tradition has not been academically proven as a practice based on Islamic law. For that reason, it is necessary to study the profit sharing system of Banyumas agricultural community to reveal their unique strategy, which has been able to improve the social welfare. Hopefully, such a model can be developed further in order to increase the lower class society standard of life.

## **B. SOCIAL TRADITION AND CULTURE**

Social tradition is a part of culture. This statement is in line with Chris Jenkes (193: 56-57), who stated that tradition is a social inheritance which develops the functions of life based on emotion and intelligence. This view is also stated by Mudji Sutrisno (2009: 25), who declared that a tradition refers to social reality based on values, mentality, and life order. A social tradition is formed of a life pattern conserved and inherited from generation to generation in a society. The society need to follow and continue the tradition of their previous generation because they feel that there are good values and practices needed in their life.

In the real life, almost all societies have their own traditions that are believed to have high values. The traditions are expressed in a certain activities which are made as a life pattern and are believed to have a power and direct influence to their life. This perspective has made a tradition is repeatedly done from generation to generation.

The discussion about tradition cannot be separated from human beings and their behavior in the society (Subiyantoro, 2010: 39). A society forms a complexity in a life pattern which is implemented from time to time until the present time. Mircea Eliade (2002: 5) perceives tradition as a conscious repetition of certain paradigmatic attitudes to express human ontology either to the universe or to God. The repetition is carried out based on the aspects of usefulness, meaningfulness, and belief in the ideology of a society. Repetition is not only limited to the repetition itself, but also related to the aspects of consciousness space that have been formed in the value system and are well embedded as a form of belief.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (2005: 30-32) argues that community traditions as a form of knowledge in a society are manifested in the habit of solving certain

problems or celebrating certain things. This knowledge usually has a basis of truth, both mystically and rationally by being able to answer the problem at hand. Community tradition, in this case, is also related to the interpretation of a society in seeing reality to be responded with beliefs and convictions. In other words, community traditions also represent community knowledge of consciously held beliefs.

The role of a figure becomes very important in carrying out community traditions. He can be the person who best knows and understands the pattern of life activities that become the behavior, both in terms of history, meaning, and procedures for implementation. These figures were used as leaders in the past, but did not rule out the possibility that these figures were ordinary people but in reality were quite respected. Kontjaraningrat (1997: 191-192) states that figures who understand the tradition of society are usually quite respected because of their knowledge and insight to explain various kinds of problems clearly. In addition, he usually has the wisdom that is applied in society and is interpreted in everyday life.

Understanding a community's tradition must be done by examining in detail the existing meanings. Clifford Geertz (1992: 16) views that culture consists of socially determined structures of meaning derived from the mind, personality, cognitive structure of people, or any other aspects. What is done by humans always has meaning because actions have an effect on others. In this context, it is necessary to perceive and examine culture by connecting everyday meanings to be lived, so that humans reach a rational understanding (Sutrisno, 2009: 50). Previous societies always gave incomplete teachings to newborn people. Therefore, the task of humanity in the future is to explore and study the cultural background comprehensively until the process of social change because what they inherit over time will disappear. Diverse forms of cultural heritage provide humanity with difficulty in overcoming future problems. Community traditions are formed with a noble knowledge system that is worth guarding.

These developments are dynamic in nature, which is characterized by inter-cultural interactions, both interactions between domestic cultures and interactions between domestic and foreign cultures along with the dynamics of world change. In this context, Indonesia faces various problems, challenges and opportunities in advancing Indonesia's National Culture. The aim is to

develop the values of the nation's cultural heritage, enrich cultural diversity, strengthen national identity, strengthen national unity and integrity, educate the life of the nation, enhance the image of the nation, realize civil society, improve the welfare of the people, preserve the nation's traditions, and influence the direction of the world's culture development. Therefore, culture is the direction of national development.

### **C. BANYUMAS AND AGRICULTURE**

Historically, Banyumas was famous as a granary. This history is inseparable from the fact that Sultan Agung made this region a place for food supplies when he attacked the Dutch in Batavia. The rice fields in Banyumas are actually not as potential as those of Brebes, Karawang, and other flat areas. Banyumas, which has many hills and watery land, has agriculture and plantations that can produce in balance. Along with the transformation of knowledge about rice as a staple food, wetlands can be used as rice fields..

Surrounded by hills, Banyumas is rather difficult to access, especially since some of its areas are separated by small rivers. The flowing water system is what makes plants in the Banyumas areas more able to survive. In addition, this is because the plantation system is based on *titian mangsa* (calculation of the season based on the Javanese version of the calendar) as well. Through the calculation system, people predict about the dry and rainy seasons, so they can realize what plants should be planted to adapt well to the season. The season calculating system becomes important because life cannot be separated from the environment.

According to Ahmad Tohari (2009), humans cannot be separated from the environment. The life of people in Banyumas, which makes some land processed into agriculture, is inseparable from the environment. In this life, humans need a place, whether in the air, water, fire, or on the ground. It is the components of space and time that makes living things need the environment as a source of cultural sphere. In fact, it can be said that humans are also a part of the environment, which will eventually form habits, traditions, and culture. What is sometimes unthinkable is the way humans perceive the environment as not the part of their lives: the environment is seen as inanimate objects around them.

Environment covers two kinds: physical and cultural environments. Physical environment is the one that can be sensed and can be easily recognized.

Meanwhile, cultural environment is the one that can form the way of thinking and life style to reach the harmony among the member of the environment. In dealing with these two kinds of environment, Banyumas people should always be wise to see the environment as two integrated matters and need to be lived in.

The environment has formed the communication pattern of Banyumas community, which is commonly called *blakasuta*. Literally, the term *blakasuta* means open or transparent; there is nothing hidden in the expression. Banyumas people are famous of being honest in expressing something as it is. The habit of unlimited interaction among Banyumas people has made the land owners and the cultivators relationship closer to one another. The way they communicate, which is called *blakasuta*, has led them to have open and transparent communication. In puppet performance, the figure of Banyumas people is represented by the character *Bawor*, who has the following characteristics: honest, kind, obedient, and living from agriculture. The specific weapon is called *kudi*, which is originally prepared for agricultural activities.

Agricultural life in Banyumas is deeply rooted from oral traditions that continue to be preserved. Agricultural life of the Banyumas community does not require any records as needed in the state administration system. Oral tradition with honesty and noble values continues to be maintained until now. Therefore, some oral agreements in Banyumas in the agricultural system can survive because of the honesty and openness of the community.

#### **D. MARO TRADITION OF BANYUMAS IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

Every human being always wants welfare in life. Efforts to build prosperity are carried out in various ways, and understood as a concept to achieve a better standard of living. Every human being strives to prosper based on an ideal picture of a peaceful and comfortable life. Perception about welfare is seen as an important concept to be in line with other human beings so there is a common standard of living. In this dynamic world, every human being strives to achieve the ideal conditions of life to achieve dreams that are in line with other humans. The efforts are pursued in different ways, but the goals remain the same.

*Maro* is done with an agreement between the two parties, namely a land owner and the cultivator based on the harvest obtained. The agreement was



made at the beginning before the cultivation process was carried out. Thus, the intention is to divide the harvest into two equal parts, half for land owners and half for land tenants. Land owners do not need to be bothered with matters of planting, care, or harvest. The land owner receives half of the harvest from the land managed by the cultivator.

Besides *maro* tradition, there are also other systems of agricultural profit sharing in Javanese community, which are commonly termed *mertelu* and *merpat*. The term *mertelu* is derived from the word *telu*, which means *three*, while *merpat* is derived from the word *papat*, which means *four*. Based on the root of the words, the former means that the harvest is divided into three parts, two-thirds of which is for the land owner, and the one-third is for the cultivator. Similarly, the latter term means that the harvest is divided into four parts, in which the land owner gets three-fourths of the harvest, while the cultivator get only one-fourth of the harvest. The last two systems, *mertelu* and *merpat*, give less benefit to the cultivator in spite of the fact that the have more responsibility and risks.

Economic systems differ from one place to the other place. Consequently, the pattern of development undertaken requires different treatments. Handling the economic system of a certain area requires strategies that are appropriate to the life arrangements of the people in the region. Society will develop and improve based on habit patterns that prioritize innovation and creation. To grow the economic system of a society requires strategies which suit the pattern of life. In Islam, the economic system for capital development can also be done through profit sharing, which is intended to avoid loss to one of the parties engaged. This system is interesting to be explored because of the potential for success in supporting the people's economy.

*Maro* tradition has become the life structure of the Banyumas community, which is in line with the culture of an agrarian society, and far from the culture of *priyayi*. A social stratification system exists in Banyumas, but the line of differentiation is very low in its history. Therefore, people's bargaining power is higher than land owners. This is reinforced by the entry of Islam into Banyumas. Islam enters by trying to eliminate the domination of the *priyayis*, ie making *muamalah* relations can be established properly. Islam provides reinforcement of *maro* tradition that has been running in society because it is essentially in accordance with Islamic values.





manages the land as well as possible to get maximum results. In this case, the harvests do not disappoint and are divided according to agreement. Banyumas people have some views on a mandate. In this case, there are two things that need to be observed. First, the mandate of locality developed. If people do not respect locality, they have insulted God's plan that has localized them at this point. Second, at this point God's power is as intensive as all the points on the surface of the earth. There is a view that it is on earth they stand, not they uphold the land and beliefs.

Kita bisa pergi ke mana-mana itu berkat pati bumi. Itu nasi yang dibuat dari pohon padi. Sekarang ini, pohon padi sedang menjalankan sunah membuat buah. Maka itulah, senang untuk menanam dan meniatkan diri untuk meneruskan amanat kehidupan dari Tuhan. Dalam setiap biji, ada amanat untuk kelangsungan hidup.

(We can go everywhere because of the starch of the earth. The rice we eat comes from plants that grow on earth. Right now, the rice tree is carrying out the Sunnah making fruit. Therefore, we must be happy to plant and intend ourselves to continue the mandate of life from God. In every seed, there is a mandate for survival.)

The interview excerpt shows the view that the rice harvest is believed to belong to God. What grows on the earth and comes down from the sky comes from God, so the cultivators view the land as a very big mandate. This view is transformed by Islam in Banyumas to protect the environment (nature), humans, and God well as a bond. This philosophy strengthens the *maro* tradition as an effort to belong together. *Maro* is a form of solidarity as well as a symbol of social equality in life in Banyumas. *Maro* is a form of togetherness for what is to be borne together.

In terms of interaction, Islam emphasizes much on the character and harmony of life that is in line with Javanese values. Embodiment of these conditions makes the teachings of Islam in Java blend with local culture. On this side, Islam, at the beginning of its spread in Java, is very thick with the values of Javanese life, the faith of whom has shifted to *Allah*. This is because people in Java are not fully open to foreign matters. Areas that were open to foreign matters were only coastal areas which were always interacting with foreign things. Rural areas such as agricultural areas were quite closed because they live with people around. Meanwhile, the palace area, which was begin-

ning to be influenced by Islam, was not totally able to make the patterns of Islamic life as a form of activity in daily life, but they were bound by tradition and culture (only the point of their belief has pivoted on *Allah SWT*).

From an Islamic perspective, *maro* tradition in Banyumas has fulfilled *mukharabah* requirements. This is because people who make contracts are adults and religious, land is profitable, there is no cheating, there is clarity on how to work on it, and there are mutual benefits. The contract is carried out before planting to agree about the matters included the tradition, namely the seeds to be planted and the costs of cultivation (hoeing, planting, and harvesting).

In the custom of the Banyumas community, hoeing is done by the cultivator, while planting and harvesting is done in a way called *sambatan*—the cultivator asks for help (*sambat* means ask for help) to others to plant and harvest. Uniquely, wages are not paid in money. Wages are paid in the form of *bawon*, i.e. the sharing of harvests to those who have helped plant and harvest. The *bawon* model is also categorized as profit sharing because it is determined by the ability of a person to plant and harvest. For example, if a person is able to help plant two rice fields, then he will also harvest the two plots later. He will get wages after harvest, which is usually nine to one or eight to one. Another model in giving *bawon* is done equally for all the people who plant and harvest. This method is done by weighing all the crops, which is one-ninth or one-eighth of it is given to the people to be divided equally among them. Such an agreement is carried out in accordance with the traditions in each village, and it cannot be changed. The people involving in agriculture have understood the pattern, so that they have automatically agree with the contract.

In *maro* tradition in Banyumas, the undefined matter is the agreement on the duration of working on the land. As long as both parties feel that no one has been harmed or there are no other causes, *maro* will continue. According to Sukiran (69), he does not specify the duration of *maro* with the cultivator. He only believes that “*life is connected to food*” so that when both parties can eat and there is no cheating in profit sharing, he still entrusts the fields to be tilled. Based on the observations in such practices, losses can occur in several ways. The losses for landowners can be the followings: 1) the feeling that the land is damaged because of the improper way in planting, 2) the harvest is

below expectation, even though there are no pests, 3) the feeling that there is an uneven distribution during harvest. Meanwhile, for cultivators, losses can arise from: 1) the presence of pests that cause crop failure, 2) weather that can damage crops (flooding, or winds that knock down plants), 3) cultivation costs with yields that are not comparable due to infertile soil. Some of these considerations usually can cause *maro* to stop.

*Maro* tradition can provide an increase in income. However, for many cultivators, this is not the main income because the profit obtained is not too much. Tarwan (57) said that cultivating rice with *maro* system is made as a fulfillment of rice, so that he does not need to buy it. It can be said, he, as a cultivator, only makes the harvest from *maro* as an effort to not buy rice, while in the household there are many other basic needs. This is in contrast to Sardi (53), who lives *maro* with several land owners. He can work on several lands (currently 4 lands). One land is used as food that he consumes, one land to sell as a cost redeemer for the production of four fields, while the other two fields are used to fulfill daily needs. His ability to work on a lot of land is supported by honesty to the owner so that he is always trusted.

*Maro* tradition is a symbolic manifestation of society in shaping the cultural arena, which is supported by various legal instruments (state and religion). Social solidarity, morals, and beliefs are important in interacting with others. The support of the Islamic religion leads to obtaining *halal* sustenance and the existence of Law No. 2 of 1960 concerning profit sharing forming a bond in rational agreement. In addition, the strong oral culture and a sense of trust have made the Banyumas community ignore the written agreement.

*Maro* as a symbolic form describes rationally about the harmony of life to get the common welfare, without feeling compelled or pressured by other parties. Therefore, there are premises that are believed to be the truth in welfare through efforts to maintain the mandate to work on land. The pattern of obedience is limited by cultural thinking, in which the community will manage other possibilities of a synergistic life. The functions that the community will get have opened the treasury of knowledge about the *maro* tradition in the process of planting to harvesting rice. The contract is carried out along with the transformation of the structure of life through communicative actions that continue to transform in the structure of society. Society as an actor is in a circle

of mechanisms that has been conceptualized logically and reasonably. With the various interpretations of the contract, a habit can be transformed into a tradition. It can be said that *maro* is a cultural rational heritage that is very rational to be able to live in the middle of the stretched land. Thus, the action that moves from the community in *maro* is freedom from the community to determine an activity with contract communication as directives to gain trust (*nerimo ing padhum*).

In this pattern, there is a transformation of Islam into the local culture of Banyumas, namely through traditions where the essence of its values has been directed towards Islamic sharia. Tradition, which is formed from the habits of society, is a form of internalization of Islamic values carried out through the development of social activity. Some *maro* actors do not really understand the basics or requirements of the *mukhabarah* in accordance with the principles of fiqh. It's just that what they do does not deviate from the basics or the requirements of the *mukhabarah*.

## E. CONCLUSION

This research found that the *maro* tradition in Banyumas became popular since the entry of Islam in Banyumas. Because of their busy schedule, the land owners rent out their land to the tenants with a *maro* system, by which the harvests are divided into two equal parts; one part for the land owner, and one other part is for the cultivator. With this pattern, there is justice for those who participate in the process of rice production, i.e. the land owner and the cultivators. This system is in line with Islamic teachings, which emphasizes the pattern of profit sharing based on the efforts and results. The landowners give freedom to the cultivators and the net harvest (total harvest minus the production cost) obtained is divided equally between the two parties. *Maro* system in Banyumas, which was carried out with an oral contract, is considered not to burden the cultivators because of a clear counting system and easy procedures. Social solidarity is also formed in this tradition because it includes some people to help the planting and harvesting process in a certain system, which is called *sambatan*.

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