



SAFAR RITUAL IN SERUWAY ACEH TAMIANG DISTRICT

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Abstract

This study aims to see the background of the implementation of the kenduri safar ritual, the process of implementing the kenduri safar ritual and the symbolic meaning contained in the implementation of the kenduri safar ritual in Pantai Balai Village, Seruway District, Aceh Tamiang Regency. The research method used is a qualitative research type with an ethnographic approach, meaning that the researcher himself is directly involved in field work. The data collection techniques used are participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. The stages of qualitative data analysis techniques used in this study are domain analysis and taxonomic analysis. The kenduri safar ritual is one of the important cultural events in Pantai Balai Village, Aceh Tamiang, which is held every year in the month of Safar. This month is considered sacred, with various prohibitions, such as traveling and riding a motorbike at high speed. This ritual is carried out to ward off disaster and seek protection from danger, strengthen solidarity and social relations. This month of Safar also worries the people in Pantai Balai Village, therefore the kenduri safar ritual is carried out in other words to reject the ball. Kenduri safar is usually done to ward off disaster and ask for protection from all forms of danger. This activity involves various elements of society, from traditional figures, religious leaders, to the general public. All communities participate in the process of the kenduri safar ritual stages. Starting from the preparation stage, cooking together, praying together and eating together to create a strong togetherness in society. The kenduri safar ritual is rooted in Islamic religious traditions, with local elements such as special foods and praying together in a place, namely the riverbank. Kenduri safar is one form of preserving local cultural identity. Through the symbolic meaning of kenduri safar, praying together, and practices that have been carried out from generation to generation, this tradition maintains the sustainability of cultural values amidst the challenges of modernization and globalization.

Keywords: *Ritual, Safar, Tolak Bala*

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INTRODUCTION

Society is a unity of human life that interacts according to a certain system of customs that is continuous, and which is bound by a sense of shared identity. Continuity is a unity of society that has four characteristics, namely: first, interaction between its citizens. Second, customs. Third, continuity of time. Fourth, a sense of identity that binds all citizens (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Culture is transmitted historically and manifested in symbolic form. Customs are patterns of behavior and actions that are recognized and implemented by society. The existence of infrastructure for interaction does cause citizens of a human collective to interact with each other (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). According to anthropology, culture according to Koentjaraningrat is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works in the context of community life that are made human property by learning (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). 3 (three) forms of culture explained by Koentjaraningrat are first, as a complex of ideas, concepts, values, norms, regulations and so on. Second, as a complex of patterned activities and actions of humans in society. Third, culture as objects produced by humans. The structure of culture consists of seven universal cultural elements: religious and belief systems, social systems and organizations, knowledge systems, language, art systems, livelihood systems, and technology and equipment systems. Religion plays an important role in community life. Religion is a system of symbols that helps individuals communicate with their universe, according to the anthropology of religion. Religion and culture influence each other. A rite or ceremony consists of certain elements of action and various analyses in anthropology contain five components of religion.

Classification of religious principle theories: (Koentjaraningrat, 1985), in the *Pratiwi* journal, classifies theories about religious principles into three groups: those that focus on religious beliefs, supernatural or

supernatural things, and religious ceremonies. Definition of culture: Culture is a pattern of basic assumptions of a group in a society or a way of life of many people, consisting of systematic human activities that are passed down from generation to generation (Wibowo, 2013). Anthropologists are interested in the role of religion in society and its origins. The Kenduri Safar Ritual in Pantai Balai Village A recurring practice in Pantai Balai Village is the Kenduri Safar ritual, which is held in the second month of the Islamic calendar, Safar. Roy A Rappaport, in the book *Ritual and Religion In The Making of Humanity*, (1999: 24) uses the term ritual to indicate the performance of more or less invariant series of formal actions and is not fully encoded by the players. Rappaport tries to elaborate on religion and humanity to show that religious and social truths can be found in rituals. Rituals are complex and static actions that need to be interpreted according to the ritual actors. The community considers the month of Safar as a holy month that has prohibitions, such as traveling far and riding a motorbike at high speed to avoid accidents. Susanne Langer (in her work *Philosophy in a New Key*, Cambridge, Mass, 1942) in her book *Dhavamony, Mariasusai* (1995: 174) shows that ritual is an expression that is more logical than just psychological ritual shows the order of the symbols that are objectified. These symbols express behavior and feelings, and form the disposition of the individuals of the worshipers following their respective models. Clifford Geertz (1992: 50) in the book *Culture and Religion* shows various conceptions of symbols. This last understanding is used by Geertz in interpreting symbols. Geertz said that something can be called a symbol because it contains symbolic elements. The kenduri safar ritual aims to ward off disaster, provide a sense of security, and strengthen social solidarity. This ritual is not just a tradition, but a means to strengthen relationships. This ritual is believed to be able to ward off bad luck and difficulties, and is a product of a

unique interaction between local culture and religious influences in places like Aceh Tamiang. Kenduri safar is done to build a transcendental relationship with the Almighty and involves special foods, communal prayers, and sacred places such as graves or riverbanks. Kenduri safar is a form of community that is religious in nature.

Anthropologically, religious social units can be manifested in various forms, including nuclear families, larger kinship groups, community units, and religious organizations. In studying and understanding a culture that grows in society, symbols are one of the most important aspects to study and understand. The existing symbols are interpreted in their meaning and become the general understanding of society which will later be passed on to the next generation in the society Sutrisno, Mudji and Putranto, Hendar (2005). The kenduri safar ritual involves a combination of several clans, tribes, and villages. Tombs are considered sacred places where the spirits of the deceased reside, and beliefs about tombs reflect a combination of customary beliefs, cultural values, and religious teachings. Theories from various disciplines provide insight into why and how people honor tombs, as well as the psychological and social impacts of this practice. In her book Dhavamony, Mariasusai (1995: 180) ceremonies as social control are intended to control the behavior and welfare of individuals for themselves as individuals or shadow individuals. It is all intended to control, in a conservative way, behavior, state of mind, feelings and values in the group for the community as a whole. Safar ritual can be seen as a way to overcome collective anxiety related to bad luck in other words to ward off disaster for the community in Kampung Pantai Balai. Kenduri safar is also one of the ceremonies or rituals carried out by the community every year. Another function of the ritual is as a protector, which can function as a symbolic act of protection that is believed to be able to ward off disaster or bad luck that

has been believed by the community. Usually, rituals are accompanied by symbolic forms in the process of their implementation are also sacred or have seriousness. In the process of implementation, rituals are regulated based on rules and values that have distinctive characteristics and refer to sacred properties.

Ritual is something related to spiritual beliefs and beliefs with a specific purpose. This means that ritual is a way of behavior or a series of behaviors that are often carried out by society in certain situations because it has become a habit. (Imam Suprayogo, Socio-Religious Research Methodology, (Bandung: Remaja Rosda Karya, 2001: 41)

Rituals can be divided into 4 (four) types, namely

1. Magical actions, which are associated with the use of materials that work because of mystical powers;
2. Religious actions, the cult of ancestors also works in this way;
3. Constitutive rituals that express or change social relations by referring to mystical understandings, in this way life ceremonies become distinctive; and
4. Factitive rituals that increase productivity or strength, or purification and protection, or in other ways increase the material welfare of a group (Dhavamony, 1995: 175)

Ritual acts include worship and glorification, worship, dhikr, eating ritual food, maintaining purity and from pollution which includes abstaining from certain foods, taboo acts, fasting, giving alms, making regular visits to holy places and taking the time to visit other sacred places (Budiwanti, 2000: 27). In pre-modern and primitive societies, sacredness is both power and reality. This understanding is carried over into the modern era by understanding sacred power as eternity and fulfillment (Mircea Eliade, 10-12). Unfortunately, every appearance of hierophany always brings up the essence of contradictory-paradoxical coexistence, eternity with non-eternity,

absolute-relative and others. (Mircea Eliade, 1996, 29). As something sacred, religious texts are supernatural, extraordinary, unforgettable and extremely important. Their eternity is contained in the fullness of substance and reality. The concept of the sacred is understood as the source and center of religion. (Daniel L. Pals, 256)

METHODOLOGY

The type of research to be conducted is a qualitative research method with an ethnographic approach. Qualitative research methods mean that the researcher himself is directly involved in field work. The researcher himself becomes a tool in collecting data and cannot be represented. Ethnography is one of the characteristics of anthropological research. According to Sugiyono (2018: 8) said that qualitative research methods are often called naturalistic research methods because the research is conducted in natural conditions (natural settings). Data collection techniques aim to make it easier to obtain information in the research process, there are various data collection techniques that can be done, including participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. First, participant observation is a data collection technique in qualitative research methods. In this case, researchers must participate and participate to obtain data in depth and more accurately and participate in the observation or research process. Second, in-depth interviews will be effective when informants can be open and focus on the research theme. Interviews are also conducted while observing the field to get optimal results. The point of view in conducting interviews must be seen from the informant's point of view (emic view). Third, documentation is useful for making it easier for writers to complete research data by including evidence from field observations. The documentation produced can be in the form of visuals in the form of images, videos or audio recordings of researchers and informants.

The qualitative data analysis techniques used in this study are domain analysis and taxonomy analysis which will be explained as follows. First, domain analysis is data obtained from the grand tour (which is a general question describing the theme being studied) and minitour questions (more focused on specific questions). In domain analysis, the analysis technique is more focused on the research domain like this. The result is a general description of the object being studied, which has not been previously known. Second, taxonomy analysis involves determining the main category, arranging the relationship between the main category and subcategories, and understanding how to group a concept. Taxonomy analysis in this study is divided into several subdomains, namely starting from the background of the kenduri safar ritual, the process of the kenduri safar ritual and the symbolic meaning of the kenduri safar. Then the subdomains are further divided so that the research becomes more focused and structured.

The research location which is a place for the author to complete and search for data is in Pantai Balai Village, Seruway District, Aceh Tamiang Regency, Aceh Province. The aim is to make it easier for the author to dig up information and data in conducting observations. So that the scope of the research object is more specific and focused. In the process of digging up information, the author carried out various ways to obtain materials and evidence in the research. One of them is like an interview with informants. Among them are first, stakeholders of Pantai Balai Village. Second, religious leaders of Pantai Balai Village. Third, the community of Pantai Balai Village.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Demographic Conditions

Figure 1. Map of Pantai Balai Village in 2024



Source: Aggregate Data of Pantai Balai Village in 2024

Pantai Balai Village is located in Seruwai District, Aceh Tamiang Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia. The demographic conditions of Pantai Balai Village, Seruwai District, Aceh Tamiang Regency, reflect the characteristics of coastal areas. This is what made the researcher choose it as a research location because of the demographic conditions of the coastal area and related to the research process which is on the edge of the river as the implementation of the safar ritual. Pantai Balai Village is located in a coastal area, which gives it direct access to waters, both large rivers and the sea. Seruwai District itself is located in the lowlands close to the river estuary area, such as the Tamiang River which is one of the main rivers in Aceh Tamiang. Pantai Balai Village borders Padang Langgis Village and Binjai Village, where Pantai Balai Village has flora and is surrounded by dominant oil palm and rubber trees. It is a livelihood for the people in Pantai Balai Village.

Table 1. Religion of the Population of Pantai Balai Village in 2024

No	Religion	Amount
1	Muslim	931
2	Catholic	0
3	Protestant	0

4	Hindu	0
5	Buddhist	0
Total		931

Source : Aggregate Data of Pantai Balai Village in 2024

Based on the data, out of a total of 931 (nine hundred and thirty one) people, all (100%) are Muslim. There are no adherents of other religions such as Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, or Buddhist in this population. This shows that the population has homogeneity in terms of religion, with all individuals adhering to the same religion, namely Islam. This condition can reflect certain cultural, geographical, or social characteristics in the region or community that support the dominance of Islam. This homogeneity can also be an important factor in designing policies, programs, or community activities that are relevant to the context of the religion. The majority of the population is Muslim, reflecting the general characteristics of Acehnese society. Religious life is quite strong, with mosques or meunasahs being the center of religious activities.

1. History of the Safar Ritual

The month of Safar in the Islamic calendar is often considered a month full of trials and tribulations. In some communities, people gather to participate in the safar ritual, a tradition that involves reciting prayers, cooking, and eating together to seek protection from Allah. This tradition also includes giving food to be shared with the community. The safar ritual has evolved over time and its implementation varies from place to place. While some communities have abandoned the tradition, others continue to practice it as part of their cultural heritage, emphasizing religious values such as praying together and giving alms.

"Ritual safa ne cadektau kite kapan mulenya, tapi ritual safa ne udah ade sejak jaman buyut kita dulu. Jadi bile udah masuk bulan safa, ada rimo yang datang mengaum,

menandake kalau harus dibuek ritual safa taen. Rimo taen punye tok agam, orang tue jaman dulu. Mengaum rimo taen tok agam udah tau die, kalau nak dibuek ritual safa. Kalau tidak buek, itulah yang bahaye. Supaye cadek ganggu kite orang pante bale."

"We don't know when this safar ritual started, but this safar feast has existed since the time of our ancestors, so when the month of Safar has arrived, a tiger will come roaring. It indicates that the safar ritual must be carried out. The tiger belonged to Atok Agam, an old man in ancient times. When the tiger roars, Atok Agam already knows that the safar ritual will soon be carried out. If it is not carried out, that is what is dangerous. So that it does not disturb us, the people of Pantai Balai." (Maritah, 62 tahun)

Further explanation by informant Maritah (62 years old) as a religious leader by explaining that this safar ritual was carried out in ancient times, while now there is a jungle or king of the forest. Atok Agam is the term for an elder who in ancient times had a king of the forest (tiger). So when the safar ritual time has arrived, the tiger will roar as a warning. That is why the safar ritual is carried out to avoid danger in Kampung Pantai Balai. Every time the safar ritual is carried out, leftover food is not allowed to be taken home because it is believed to be for the king of the forest or the tiger. But you can believe it or not. This is the story that exists in our society. Whoever brings their food home, there will be a disaster or calamity for the family who brings the food home. Excess food should not be brought home, throw away excess bombon. Throw away excess rice, throw away excess water at the event location. Therefore, the safar ritual that has been carried out previously is what we follow until now.

The event begins with cooking together, praying together and eating together on the riverbank. Leftover food is not taken home, because it is believed to be an offering for the king of the jungle or tiger. Some believe that bringing food home can cause disaster, some do not believe it. The

safar ritual is carried out without coercion, and participants pass through sacred graves, cleaning the graves of deceased relatives. This ritual does not involve giving or offerings, because in essence it is a ritual to ward off disaster.

2. Safar Ritual Process

The safar ritual in Kampung Pantai Balai is a series of conscious actions followed for spiritual, cultural, or social purposes. This ritual can be a community group activity, which is often associated with traditions and beliefs. The kenduri safar ritual has four stages, namely preparation, implementation, prayer, and eating together. Preparation includes cleaning the area and collecting equipment and materials. In this case, firewood is collected from fallen trees or dry branches nearby using simple tools. The community begins to prepare themselves in the afternoon after the Dzuhur prayer, collecting equipment and firewood. Implementation includes cooking food together for the event. The village provides complete cooking equipment, which is stored in the Matsah house, for communal or private events. Participants bring their own seating from home for comfort during prayer and eating. Praying is the third stage, where the purpose of the event is stated, and blessings are sought. This is followed by eating together, which promotes unity and equality. The safar ritual strengthens community ties and is an integral part of life in Kampung Pantai Balai. Each stage of the ritual has a specific purpose and contributes to the overall spiritual and social meaning of the event. The tradition of travel is marked by communal cooking, which strengthens community ties and reflects mutual cooperation.

"Sebenanye bukan tukang masak, tapi uwak ni cuma mencampu bumbu yang udah dibawe oleh urang kampong dijadike satu. Kalo masak, pelennye masak same-same. Dah lame uwak dipercaya untuk mencampu

bumbu tiap ade kenduri safa, urang sini menganggap uwak lah yang bise mencampu bumbu. Padahal bumbu yang udah dibawa urang kampung yang kite campu dalam gule ayam, gule kambing iye taen."

"Actually, he is not a cook, but this wawak only mixes or concocts spices that have been brought by the community into one. When it comes to cooking, everyone cooks together. For a long time, wawak has been trusted to mix or concoct spices for every kenduri safar, the community here (Kampung Pantai Balai) considers wawak to be the one who can mix or concoct spices. In fact, the spices that have been brought by the community that we mix into the chicken curry, goat curry earlier." (Salamah, 62 years old)

Based on an interview with Mrs. Salamah (62 years old) as the cook. Usually, every community that comes brings donations in the form of cooking spices, grated coconut, temurui leaves and other cooking spices that will be cooked. In addition to bringing wrapped rice to eat, people who come also bring cutlery for each family that will attend. Such as bringing plates, spoons for eating, cups for drinking or bringing drinking bottles, bringing bowls for taking cooked side dishes, and bringing seat mats for each family. In addition to bringing the above items, people who come also bring ingredients and spices for cooking. Each spice brought is given to the cook to be combined and mixed. Some bring ready-made spices to be cooked directly, some bring grated coconut, pandan leaves, temuru leaves, lime leaves, bay leaves, cloves, cinnamon, star anise, cardamom and also salt.

Figure 2. Cook



Source : Author's documentation in 2024

Everyone, regardless of age or gender, helps each other. There are two types of food cooked, namely free-range chicken and goat curry, which symbolize the simplicity and authenticity of village life. Free-range chicken is chosen because of its natural maintenance and its higher value. Chicken and goat are slaughtered according to religious provisions, with prayers to ask for blessings. Goats can be brought as a vow, which symbolizes gratitude and protection. The slaughter of the goat vow is carried out by a village priest, with special prayers. After being slaughtered, the meat is processed into various dishes, reflecting the spirit of sharing. Women boil water to cook the chicken, and rewang, a communal cooking event, takes place. Rewang is a form of cooperation and solidarity together, making the cooking process easier and fostering social relationships.

Rewang also serves to introduce the tradition of kenduri safar to the younger generation, ensuring its sustainability. This tradition is more than just cooking; it is about community, cooperation, and shared values. Prayer is a fundamental activity in Islamic teachings, a form of worship that must follow certain provisions, such as being directed only to Allah SWT. Ridwan, 70, said that the joint prayer at the kenduri safar is a prayer to ward off danger, with participants asking for protection from Allah SWT. The prayer contains elements of aqidah, or basic beliefs in Islam.

Figure 3. Prayer Together



Source: Personal documentation in 2024

Maritah, 62, explained that in communal prayer, participants recite certain prayers and perform certain movements, such as turning their palms to avoid danger and rejecting blessings from other religions. Despite the controversy, communal prayer remains a common practice in Indonesia, with many Muslims seeing it as a way to foster unity and understanding among different religious groups. Eating together in the safar ritual is an important part of a series of events that are full of meaning and symbolism. This event is not just about eating together, but also a means to strengthen social ties, show gratitude, and celebrate togetherness between communities. Eating together in the safar ritual is a symbol of community togetherness. In the tradition of this safar ritual, participants eat together without distinguishing social status or background, which strengthens the sense of unity and harmony.

"Jadi kite nak datang ke acare kenduri safa, pelennya bawa nasi dari rumah. Bawa aje seperlunya untuk nanti sape aje yang nak datang. Nasi taen dibungkus pakek daon pisang, kalau cadek daon pisang bawe aja dibungkus pakek kertas nasi. Lebihke due bungkus untuk sape nanti yang ikut bace doe. Dibungkus iye taen, supaye nasi yang kite bawe harus habis dan tidak boleh kite bawe pulang lagi. Iyeleh tolak bala taen, ape yang terjadi biya tinggal kat sini. Gak oleh dibawa pulang."

"So those of us who want or want to come to the kenduri safar event, everyone who comes brings rice from their respective homes. Bring enough rice for anyone who wants to come and attend the kenduri safar event. The rice that was brought was wrapped using banana leaves, if there are no banana leaves, the rice can also be wrapped using rice paper. Bring 2 more (packs) of rice for each family who comes for anyone who comes to the kenduri safar event and joins in reciting the prayer. The rice was wrapped earlier, so that the rice we brought from home must be finished and the rice that has been brought cannot be brought back home." (Salamah, 62 years old)

Rice is a staple food that is always present at communal eating events. The rice that has been brought by the community is collected together. After each family takes a portion of the rice that they brought, then the rice is collected again for the community members who joined in reciting the prayer and did not bring rice.

Figure 4. Eating Together



Source: Author's documentation in 2024

The dishes served are not only for personal consumption, but also to be enjoyed together with others, including for people who come to attend the safar ritual event. Before eating, a prayer is often held together to ask for blessings and safety. After the prayer, guests will be given the opportunity to take food. Usually the food is distributed in large enough portions so that all members of the community get their share. Eating together in the safar ritual must be done with an attitude of mutual respect. Everyone is expected to eat orderly and not fight over it. Eating together is one of the main moments where people can interact with each other, chat, and strengthen social relationships between each other. All participants eat together in one place, so that an atmosphere of familiarity is created. Usually this eating together event takes place in a relaxed manner and full of laughter, people chat while enjoying the food. The meaning of eating together here is as a form of gratitude and thanks for the blessings received, preserving local culture, this eating together also aims to strengthen family ties, establish communication and interaction between

communities, and strengthen trust in each other.

3. Taboo (Prohibitions)

The taboos before the safar aim to maintain purity, intention, and harmony during its implementation. It is believed that obeying these taboos can ensure the smooth running of the event and bring blessings. In the month of safar, one should not drive at high speed or be too happy to avoid accidents and sadness. The safar ritual or Tolak Bala is carried out to prevent negative views in society. On the day of the Safar Kenduri ritual, there are also taboos that must be obeyed. Participants are expected to wear modest clothing, with women required to wear the hijab and men prohibited from wearing shorts. Impolite actions, such as speaking rudely, shouting, or joking excessively, are considered inappropriate. Playing gadgets or doing other activities that are distracting during the kenduri is also considered impolite.

After the safar ritual, the community has certain taboos that must be obeyed. There is one thing that is considered taboo by the community, namely for excess rice that has been brought, excess drinking water that has been brought, and also excess cooked food, none of it may be brought home at all. It is believed that if the remaining food is deliberately not brought home. This may or may not be believed by the community, but this is a belief that has been considered sacred by the community. However, if there are people who bring back home excess food and drink, then disaster will come to the people who brought the food and drink back to the house. These taboos aim to maintain blessings, respect customary values, and ensure that the good intentions of the event are maintained. Leftover food, drinks, and cooking may not be taken home, because it is believed that the king of the forest or ancestral spirits will come to the location of the safar ritual event. Respecting these taboos reflects respect for the customs, traditions,

and community where the event is held. These taboos are not only symbolic, but also as an effort to maintain ethics, social harmony, and blessings expected from the implementation of the safar ritual.

CONCLUSION

The safar ritual reflects the community's belief in protection from disaster. This shows the close relationship between ritual and traditional beliefs. The tradition of the safar ritual strengthens social relations in the community through cooperation in the preparation and implementation of the ritual. The community gathers to share prayers, food, and togetherness, which creates a sense of solidarity and strengthens social networks among them. The safar ritual is one form of preserving local cultural identity. Through symbols, prayers, and hereditary practices, this tradition maintains the continuity of cultural values amidst the challenges of modernization and globalization. In the midst of the challenges of an increasingly advanced era, by carrying out the safar ritual, intangible culture can be passed on to young people.

The safar ritual is usually carried out at certain times, for example in the month of safar which is considered to have negative energy or has the potential to bring disaster. The choice of this time reflects the belief in the traditional calendar and the spiritual meaning of time. The implementation of kenduri involves a series of activities, such as gathering, praying together, eating together. All of these activities strengthen social relations in society, showing the importance of togetherness. The elements involved in the safar ritual, such as certain foods, special prayers, or the way it is performed, have symbolic meanings that represent hope, protection, and gratitude. Food is often prepared together by community members as a symbol of mutual cooperation and togetherness. This process strengthens social solidarity and a sense of belonging within the community. This underlines the function of

symbols in conveying spiritual and social messages in tradition. The safar kenduri is not only a traditional ritual, but also an important medium for understanding the fundamental values that shape the identity and social life of the community. This ritual connects spirituality, culture, and social relationships, while providing insight into how traditions can survive and thrive amidst social change.

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