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PREPEGAN TRADITION IN BANDUNGAN SEMARANG: AN EFFORT TO INVENTORY OF GRASSROOT CULTURE

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HIGHLIGHT

- Traditions of grassroots communities often escape academic discussion and rarely become in-depth discussions in academic circles. The result is that the inventory of the traditions of the grassroots community is small in number when compared to the traditions of the aristocratic society or the traditions of the palace.

ABSTRACT

Tradition is not just a question of 'how the custom is done' or 'why this needs to be done'. However, at least, these methods and reasons can be passed down completely to the next generation. It can be understood well, not only as a cultural heritage, but also as a living value in the society they live in. Understanding of traditional values will be biased, degraded, and even fade or disappear altogether if no one writes them down. Writing is an inventory of civilizations. Even if it's just a fragment, it's still important. This study does not have a complicated goal such as analyzing patterns of cultural integration, or interpreting traditional symbols. Just a small effort to write down the cultural phenomena that occur in the environment around the researcher. Not a culture of elite society, but the culture of farmers, middlemen, traders, and other lower class groups. At least, through this paper, the researcher hopes that there will be more who conduct studies on grassroots culture..

KEYWORD

Culture, Inventory, Grassroots

A. INTRODUCTION

As stated by Ernst Cassirer in his book entitled *Man and Culture: An Essay on Man*, that among the phenomena of human culture, the most difficult to approach with purely logical analysis are myth and religion. He said that at first glance myth looks like 'chaos' or an incoherent and formless collection of ideas. Therefore he thought that searching for the 'reasoning' behind those ideas seemed very futile. And even if these myths have a characteristic or characteristic, then the only characteristic is 'the absence of cause or reason' (Cassirer & Alois A Nugroho., 1990). Borrowing words from Milton, the shape of the mythical world will still be a dark sea of unfathomable, limitless, without size, length, width and weight, and time and place lost without a trace.

In such an effort, humans try to approach the result of the embodiment of culture, the result of human thought that is passed down from generation to generation through oral. If the written cultures are generally the property of the elite, then 'grassroots' cultures are often missed from cultural inventory projects. As a result, the next generation only knows 'traditional practices' without understanding the 'reasons for tradition' that exist and continue until their time. As long as the practice is maintained by the lower classes, the elites don't have to bother interrupting the practice as long as it doesn't have the potential to activate 'chaos'. With such a pattern, many traditions at the grassroots, the grassroots, are not well explored and maintained in meaning and purpose.

Rhoni Rodin in his writings said that the influence of tradition and culture on religious practices can be found in people's lives, especially in the phenomenon of Javanese society (Rodin, 2013). In addition, still in the same article, Rodin explains that culture in Dutch means "*cultuur*", while in Latin "*Colere*" which can be interpreted as "cultivating", "working on", "fertilizing", and "developing". Rodin quotes Koentjaraningrat in Sujarwa as saying that culture is the totality of behavior and the results of human behavior which are governed by norms that are obtained by learning, and all of them are arranged in people's lives. Based on the explanation, it can be seen that culture is the whole of human behavior that is obtained through the learning process so that it is structured in people's lives. Still in the same article, Rodin quotes Peransi that tradition comes from the word "*traditium*" which can be interpreted as "everything that is transmitted", "passed down by the past to the present". Through this definition, it can be understood that tradition is a cultural heritage or past habit that is preserved continuously until the present.

As explained in the meaning of tradition above, everything that has been done continuously and passed down from the past to the present includes tradition. With this understanding, it can be said that the *Prepegan tradition* carried out by the people in Bandungan Semarang is a tradition because these activities have been carried out from ancient times until now. There are many traditions that still need to be 'saved', one of which is the *Prepegan tradition* which is a tradition rooted in Javanese society. From several reciprocal and untidyly inventoried literature, this tradition exists in many areas in almost the entire island of Java. Starting from West

Java, Central Java, and East Java. Even though they have different understandings and practices, they have some similarities in some respects. The tradition of *Prepegan* in Javanese is termed '*prepek*' or '*Prepegan*'. In his writings, Zoetmoelder wrote that the origin of the word from the root word '*prepeg* (*pa-repeg*)' is '*rep*', ie particle description, (with) sudden. Re-word '*rep-rep*' or '*arep-rep*', which means; with a rapid and sudden movement, fluttering.

Prepegan is a tradition that still continues today in the Bandung area, Semarang, Central Java. That is a tradition where people flock to shop for necessities at the market ahead of certain days. Such as Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and other religious holidays. In addition, *Prepegan* also takes place before national holidays such as the Independence Day of the Republic of Indonesia on August 17th.

In the *Prepegan* tradition, there are interrelated aspects, namely between culture and economy. In his writings, Throsby argues that systems analysis can provide a means of unifying economic and cultural systems in an integrated framework. It is then proposed that the link between economy and culture can be built through the concept of "culturally sustainable development", which can be defined in terms of criteria relating to the advancement of material and non-material well-being, inter- and intra-generational equity, and recognition of interdependence (Throsby, 1995). Throsby's paper shows that conceptualizing the interactions between cultural and economic systems in these terms can provide a workable model for policy analysis.

This research is also intended to take inventory of the *Prepegan* tradition as one of the traditions of the grassroots community which is still ongoing today. An inventory of such traditions is very important. Some good examples of an inventory of traditions that take place in grassroots communities such as the writings of Athoillah Islamy and Ahmad Syarif Makatita discussing the Bakar Batu tradition in Papua, entitled "*Religious Moderation In The Bakar Batu Tradition At The Dani Muslim Community In Jayawijaya, Papua Province, Indonesia*" (Islamy & Makatita, 2022). This research is very interesting because tradition is not only positioned as ceremony and sacredness, but comes to its implementation to actual human problems.

Then there is also an interesting inventory example, namely the writing of Alamsyah Syarifah Fatimah and Wahyu Kurniati Asri entitled "*The Philosophical Meanings Of The Ma'duangan Ceremonial Culture (Patang Puloan) In Batunoni Village Anggeraja District Enrekang Regency*" (Fatimah & Kurniati Asri, 2022). This research is very interesting because it is not just an inventory that is limited to recording events and subjects, but reaches the stage of philosophical study.

B. METHOD

The type of research that is written in this paper is qualitative research conducted in the field or field research. The focus of this research is the culture of the grassroots community practiced by some Javanese people, namely the *prepegan* tradition. The location of this research specifically takes place in the Bandung

District, Semarang Regency, and Central Java Province. Precisely in Pasar Bandungan, where the sellers and buyers come from the surrounding villages and from outside the area. So there is no limit to where these sources come from, but limited to what they do in the market and the situations that occur in the market.

Source of data from this research comes from primary data and secondary data. The primary data in this study were the results of interviews with several informants and the results of direct observations by researchers in the field, which were conducted randomly. While the secondary data in this study are in the form of texts or written manuscripts both physically and non-physically from books and free articles that can be accounted for. Data collection techniques in this study were through interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The data analysis technique is by reducing unnecessary data, and then displaying primary and secondary data with analysis through Van Peursen's theory, which then draws conclusions from the analysis (Huberman & Miles, 2014).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Prepegan in Several Regions

In contrast to some areas. For example in Indramayu, this *Prepegan tradition* lasts for one day before the holiday. *Prepegan* in that place is interpreted as the Tumpah Market, which is a place where people shop for various needs. Starting from clothes, food ingredients, fireworks and others. The prices are varied and the majority are cheap. Reporting from merdeka.com, the *Prepegan tradition* was originally a habit of residents from two regions in Central Java, namely Brebes and Tegal. Over time, the tradition began to take root in Indramayu Regency when many residents of Central Java came to the northern coastal area of West Java. Previously, *Prepegan* was a traditional market that only sold flowers or flowers for pilgrimage purposes ahead of Eid al-Fitr. Over time, the *Prepegan market* has transformed into a traditional market that only exists once a year. The *Prepegan* tradition is held once a year on the day before Eid. *Prepegan* is a cheap spill market. In Indramayu, there are only Kedungwungu and Wanguk villages (Kautsar, 2022). Another uniqueness of the *Prepegan market tradition* in Indramayu is related to the myth that you should not shop before walking to the end of the market. It is said that this is a hereditary belief where visitors there are required to walk from north to south and when at the village crossroads they are required to spread certain denominations. After the myth was carried out, residents and visitors at the *Prepegan market* were only allowed to buy goods as needed (Kautsar, 2022).

In contrast to what happened in the Tegal community, quoted from wartabahari.com, the *Prepegan tradition* is divided into two types, namely small *Prepegan* and big *Prepegan*. *Prepegan small* two days before Eid and big *Prepegan* the day before Eid. *Prepegan* is used properly to find the needs of Eid, from after dawn and in the evening *Prepegan* is still crowded with people. Identical to the goods sold are diverse and the prices are quite affordable, many people flock to shop (Mu'min, 2020).

Quoted from detik.com, in the people of Brebes, Central Java, *Prepegan* has almost become an obligation before Eid, even though it is just buying flowers for pilgrimage. Eid is not complete if you miss the *Prepegan tradition*. This *Prepegan* tradition begins two days before the holiday. At *Prepegan Kecil*, two days before Idul Fitri, residents will shop at the market to look for basic needs that must be available during Eid. Such as culinary ketupat, lepet and other necessities such as tomb pilgrimage equipment, be it flowers and pandan leaves. While the big *Prepegan*, which takes place the day before Eid, residents will look for complete clothing and sandals and others. Shopping on this large *Prepegan* tends to spend large amounts of money because the items to be purchased are expensive (Suripto, 2017).

Some Differences: Prepegan in Bandungan Semarang

From some of the examples above, there are fundamental differences between the *Prepegan tradition* in Bandungan Semarang and some of the places mentioned above. First, in other areas, the *Prepegan tradition* is divided into two, namely the small *Prepegan* and the large *Prepegan*. However, in Bandungan Semarang this is not different. However, there is only the name of the *Prepegan tradition*. There is no difference in terms, even in practice there is no clear difference. If in other areas there is a little *Prepegan* whose time is two days before Eid, then in Bandungan Semarang even since seven days before Lebaran it has also been called *Prepegan* if market conditions have improved. And if in other areas there is a big *Prepegan* that occurs the day before Eid, then in Bandungan Semarang it is also referred to as *Prepegan* only. No small or big.

Second, in other areas, most of it only happens in one or two days before Eid. Meanwhile, in Bandungan Semarang, the *Prepegan tradition* can occur even from seven to five days before Eid. This even lasts until one day before Eid or even after Eid. It all depends on market conditions whether they are still in a state of increasing transactions or not. If it still is, then it means that *Prepegan* can be understood that it is still ongoing. When will it end? When the market is quiet.

Third, in other areas, the *Prepegan tradition* is famous for its cheap markets. In a sense, the prices in the *Prepegan market* are affordable and become a means for people to shop at much cheaper prices. This is different from the one in Bandungan Semarang. In Bandungan Semarang, when the *Prepegan tradition* took place, prices soared very high. In fact, it is considered by the public to understand when prices go up and they only know that *Prepegan* is in progress. And they understand, accept the price increase without asking the reason behind the price increase when the *Prepegan tradition* takes place.

Prepegan tradition in Bandungan Semarang does not have the exact time because it all depends on market conditions. The public can only predict the approximate date, which is D-7 to D-1 before the holiday. As for the hours themselves, it depends on how crowded the market is and the transactions that take place in the market.

The main variable in the *Prepegan tradition* is when prices suddenly rise and even soar. When that happens, *Prepegan* is declared to have started. Even if it starts

without a standard or stated beginning, or there is a moment that marks the opening of *Prepegan*. None of that is in the *Prepegan tradition*. Completely in control of the market. Even for the closure, there are no special conditions. There is only a situation where market participants have started to leave the market and the market gradually calms down and then prices return to normal. This marks the end of the *Prepegan tradition*.

In *Prepegan* it can be assumed that there are two main actors who carry out this tradition. The first is the seller, the second is the buyer. However, in practice, there is no clear boundary between these two actors because everyone can become a seller and everyone can become a buyer, depending on time and conditions. For example, a vegetable farmer who has just harvested comes to the market to sell his produce. At that time that person's position was as a seller because transactions were often carried out directly between farmers and consumers. After the vegetables were sold and the farmer got some money, the person immediately spent the money to buy some necessities without going home first. This is because prices tend to increase for an unknown time limit. These concerns encourage people to immediately shop for necessities without wanting to wait any longer.

When the price suddenly doubles or even triples, the public or buyers will not protest because the *Prepegan tradition* is still going on. Even when the seller offers a high price, he doesn't mind or is afraid that his merchandise will not sell because the *Prepegan tradition* is still ongoing. The price agreement just happened, you could say a condition where the market is confused about determining the actual price but the market is in an uptrend (Bullish Trend). This is common in the *Prepegan tradition*. After the *Prepegan tradition* ends, prices tend to return to normal. Or even in some goods the price has fallen significantly.

For example, when the *Prepegan* tradition takes place, the price of roses can increase gradually from Rp. 35,000 for one basket to Rp. 350,000 for one basket. Up to 10 times. All sellers will compete to find the smallest margin for profit, even the buyers. Compete to find a seller who has the lowest price. But when the price has reached its saturation point, the seller is tired of playing with the price and the buyer is tired of bidding. Usually the price has reached a stable point which marks the *Prepegan tradition* at its peak. In the case of roses during the *Prepegan tradition*, the price usually tends to be stable when it is at Rp. 300,000 to Rp. 350,000 for one basket.

What is very interesting about this *Prepegan tradition* is when the *Prepegan tradition* is placed in the economic field as stated by Bakker. Bakker writes that the economic field is usually divided into three sectors and the percentage of human resources engaged in each sector reflects quite well the nature of a culture and its main orientation.

The primary sector devotes the power of extraction, namely producing raw materials from the earth's nature and from life on earth, sea, and space. This work consists of mining, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing. The secondary sector processes raw materials produced in the primary sector and includes industry,

crafts, and construction. Both require manual labor. The tertiary sector includes all kinds of services to the community which optimally consist of a "*six-service standard*". These are livelihoods, distribution and communication, law and security, education and education, health, arts and entertainment.

In the *Prepegan tradition*, it is almost indistinguishable or indeed an abstract mix of the three sectors. For example, a farmer (extractor, first sector) who brings his own land products to the market (distribution, third sector) and then sells them directly door-to-door (communication) to consumers. Of course, the farmer must first beautify his merchandise in such a way that it is suitable to be sold at a high price when the *Prepegan tradition* is in progress (*crafter*, second sector). And all that can be done by one human being, the Farmer.

Another Prepegan Tradition

In another article entitled *Socio-Cultural Behavior of Peasants Who Have a Tendency to Cause Shirk in the Life of the Cirebon Society* written by Setia Budiyo, it is said that the *Prepegan tradition* is a ritual performed before the rice harvest by farmers. The article claims that all the rituals carried out by the farmers are not in accordance with the rules of Islamic aqidah, and are classified as shirk and are included in the unforgivable sin (Budiyo & Ta'dib, 2018). The article explains that *Prepegan* is done before the rice harvest. The ritual is a sign that the harvest will soon be carried out and harvested symbolically by regional leaders and followed by other communities. Setia said that in general, ritual performers are used to doing it because they think the act is not shirk. They stated that what they did was an expression of gratitude to God. According to him, actually they have mixed up the right with the false (Budiyo & Ta'dib, 2018).

Of course, in terms of *Prepegan* used by Setia, it is not meaningful in practice. Because in the *Prepegan Tradition* that the author is highlighting in this paper, it is not a tradition carried out by farmers before harvest, but a tradition that is carried out before major holidays or certain days and is carried out in the market which is generally a public space and is related to the topic; economy and culture. Not a ritual as referred to in Setia's writing.

In terms of socio-religious matters, the *Prepegan tradition* that took place in Bandungan Semarang, I – as a local community, see that there is absolutely no element of shirk or anything like that. Even though this tradition is motivated by many factors, such as the community's need to prepare for the holiday (religious factors) or in the context of the community preparing for other ritual agendas (traditional factors or local beliefs). However, it needs to be seen from a more relevant and inclusive religious perspective that it needs to be realized that it is part of the diversity of the Indonesian nation and at the same time as a cultural asset. Therefore, it needs to be preserved and maintained for its continuity.

In Van Peursen's Perspective

In the cultural philosophy, Van Peursen sees cultural development and divides it into three stages, namely starting from the mythical stage, the stage where

humans at first strongly believe in mythical things, second to the ontological stage, namely a stage of wanting to get out of the mythical shackles that so far they believed. And the last is the functional stage, namely at this stage humans are no longer fascinated by the mythical realm, in other words that at this stage humans are able to free themselves from the mythical siege and do not believe in it anymore. At this functional stage, everything is seen from the aspect of its function.

Although Van Peursen divides it into three stages, but in his explanation, he does not divide it in the sense that one stage is higher or lower than the other. As stated by Soedjatmoko in the introduction to the book *Cultural Strategy* written by Van Peursen, he said that Van Peursen presented a cultural model in three stages, namely the mythological stage, ontological stage, and functional stage. But in contrast to previous theories, Van Peursen does not present it as a sequence of steps, where the next rung is higher than the previous rung, but he emphasizes that the three stages, also in which the progression exists, each contain elements of the other stages, though in different forms. Therefore, according to Soedjatmiko, the approach is structural, not phenomenological or based on knowledge theory (CA VAN, 1976).

In the *Prepegan tradition* that took place in Bandungan Semarang, the author does not see the mythical aspect in the practice of the Prepegan tradition itself, but it is not completely independent of the mythic influence. However, this mythical aspect is found in the factors that influence the occurrence of the *Prepegan tradition* itself, it can be said structurally. One of the factors in question is religion and belief. Religious practice in the Bandungan Semarang community, which is predominantly Muslim, on certain days, especially before Idul Fitri, will hold a grave pilgrimage. Not only Muslims, but it is also done by adherents of the belief that there are also many in Bandungan Semarang. In the procession of the pilgrimage to the grave, Muslim pilgrims carry roses that are sprinkled on the graves they visit. In addition to the graves they visit, pilgrims usually also sprinkle these flowers on the graves of relatives.

Slightly different from the Muslim pilgrims, the pilgrims from the faith or Kejawen besides sprinkling flowers on the graves, they also make offerings that they place in places where they believe there are spirits of the ancestors (related to the belief of animism, dynamism, and will not be discussed in this article). Therefore, the price of interest when the *Prepegan tradition* takes place soars due to the increasing number of requests. This is because it is not only the Islamic community who need to visit the graves (in some Islamic sects using roses and sowing them on the graves they visit), but some local beliefs or Kejawen who usually also perform certain rituals before the holiday (even though they are not Muslims, but they participate in celebrating in their own way, such as putting up offerings as a form of gratitude to nature). Religion and belief are precisely the main reasons, natural factors that make people want to buy even though interest prices have increased more than 100 times, from those on weekdays it only ranges from 3000 rupiah to 5000 rupiah, when approaching Eid can reach 300,000 rupiah.

At this stage of the mythical, in the *Prepegan tradition*, it is found in the 'cause' and not in the tradition itself if the definition used is mythic as usual. However, if unreasonable price increases, irrational buying decisions, and how this kind of 'chaotic' market conditions can occur, are categorized as 'mythical things', then a multi-disciplinary study is needed to be able to provide an adequate explanation. For example, from an unreasonable price increase, it requires at least a set of macro-microeconomic theory, at least an economic study that can answer questions such as; what makes the price rise suddenly to 100 times or the equivalent of 10,000%? How can consumers decide to buy and what variables make consumers accept that price?

That's just from an economic point of view, not to mention the problem of moderation between beliefs, considering that it is not only one group that needs goods, but that there are several groups, at the same time, also needing these goods and at the same time and place. Discussions about tolerance will emerge, pluralism will emerge, communication patterns between religions, and much more.

The second stage is the ontological stage where people want to get out of the mythical shackles. In the *Prepegan tradition*, the writer finds that this stage can be seen in some young people who tend to no longer make pilgrimages so that they do not buy flowers or shop for necessities when the *Prepegan tradition* takes place. This, according to the author's observations, occurs because traditions such as visiting graves and sowing flowers are considered ancient. In addition, there are those who believe that sending a prayer does not have to use facilities such as flowers, it is enough to just send a prayer. In addition to the ancient assumptions and views that permeate young people, the existence of transnational ideologies that have become active in Indonesia has also become an alternative at this ontological stage. A kind of legitimacy of the *aqidah*, although it is still pro and contra, but it cannot but be one of the aspects considered in relation to the new paradigm of society in viewing the *Prepegan tradition*. Why is this important? Because the new understanding enters the community structure and plays a role in decision making. Recently, many products are advertised with the label 'halal' and 'sharia' as patrons in the study of religious commodification. It is clear that in this respect religion plays an important role in consumer purchasing decisions. If we look at the latest studies from academics, discussions about the relationship between religion and purchasing decisions, commodification of religion, halal labels, and so on. It appears that the ontological stage as meant by Van Peursen that humans want to get out of the mythical shackles, does not really want to get out of the 'unknown', but seeks salvation through the 'unknown'.

While in the third stage, namely the functional stage. This is what the author found from people who are *mremo*, namely taking advantage of the moment when the *Prepegan tradition* takes place by selling something to make a profit in a short period of time or in economic language, these kinds of actors are commonly referred to as Short Sellers. As for what is being traded, there can be many things, but usually the people who are *mremo* mostly sell flowers, either roses, flowers in pots, or

flowers that are arranged together. The *Prepegan* tradition in this case is functioned as a place to seek maximum profit and also functions as a moment where market players – not all of them, usually play their own price, under the pretext of *Prepegan*. From the point of view of a capitalistic society, it is clear that the *Prepegan tradition* is a momentum to get as much profit as possible. Is it wrong? Or right and fine and not a problem? Then questions like; Is it good to use tradition as a means to enrich oneself? Such ethical issues will arise later when viewed from an ethical problem.

More importantly, religious communities, Muslims and non-Muslims, at this functional stage at least understand that what they get from this *Prepegan* tradition can make themselves feel better because they think that their task as individuals towards their God has been completed. Their duty as individuals towards their ancestors had been completed. It doesn't matter how much it costs, but the feeling of security and comfort, as well as inner satisfaction is not something that can be exchanged for a certain amount of money. At least, at the functional stage, this kind of behavior is found in Muslims who understand the basis and arguments for why people use flowers for pilgrimage. Also to believers, they believe that this is how they worship their ancestral spirits. Once again, it does not lie in the *Prepegan tradition* directly, but in another practice, another tradition, which is the cause and reason for the *Prepegan tradition* itself.

D. CONCLUSION

The Prepegan is a grassroots tradition and grassroots tradition that is rarely well inventoried. In fact, there is much that can be studied in this tradition because there are so many elements that have not been discussed in this paper or in previous writings. There is a kind of pattern of integration between economic, social, and religious which forms the complex background in the *Prepegan tradition*. The limitations of the explanation in this paper, obtained after going through several interviews with market participants, the majority of whom do not understand how to see *Prepegan* as a cultural phenomenon. They simply replied, "Well, this is it," or, "That's all I know." In addition to the actors who did not understand what they were doing, the writings that the researchers encountered were also scattered randomly in the media, which only presented informative facts, and did not constitute a cultural analysis. Writings about *Prepegan* appear very minimal in academic scientific writings. This is just the author's assumption, maybe because of the confusion in placing this tradition in another tradition container because there are no rituals contained in the *Prepegan tradition*. Or because there are no symbols in the *Prepegan tradition*, or maybe because there is no kind of folklore or fairy tale found in the *Prepegan tradition*. However, that is precisely the task of academics. Thank you to Koentjaraningrat who has pioneered the writings on Javanese culture written by individuals who were born and grew up in the environment in which he wrote. Really writing and reviewing isn't just a prerequisite for graduation or getting academic points. Rather writing in a solid effort as an integral part of Javanese society itself. Therefore, the author recommends academics who have more mature glasses to study this further, considering that in this case the author

realizes that there is still a long way to go from discussing cultural issues. Not only as a cultural inventory project, but also as an effort to pass on intellectual property.

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