

Resilient Tradition: The Resilience of Nyekar tradition Amidst the Covid-19 Changes

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Abstract

The Nyekar tradition in Sinaraga Public Cemetery, Bandung, has become an inseparable part of the local community's life. This research aims to understand the sustainability of the Nyekar tradition amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was conducted by documenting and analyzing the Nyekar tradition, describing the condition of Sinaraga Public Cemetery leading up to Ramadan, and investigating the adaptation of the Nyekar tradition during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research method used was qualitative with a field study approach. The findings show that the Nyekar tradition in Sinaraga Public Cemetery has remained resilient during the pandemic, with the majority of participants continuing to practice the tradition as usual. This tradition has deep roots in religious, economic, social, and cultural aspects. The sustainability of the Nyekar tradition demonstrates the resilience and adaptation of the community in the face of changes brought about by the pandemic. This research provides a deeper understanding of the sustainability of the Nyekar tradition in Sinaraga Public Cemetery amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The implications of these findings can serve as a basis for preserving and promoting the sustainability of this important cultural tradition for the local community.

Keywords: Adaptation; Bajau community; Modernization; Traditional practices; Urbanization.

Introduction

The tradition of Nyekar or pilgrimage to graves holds strong social significance for the local community. This tradition is not only a moment to visit and care for the graves of ancestors but also an opportunity for family members scattered in various cities to gather and strengthen social bonds (Nurqo'id & Agus Machfud Fauzi, 2022). Furthermore, in another study conducted by Saputri (2021), it was found that the Nyekar tradition is considered as one of the cultural heritages that play a crucial role in maintaining the identity and togetherness of the local community (Saputri et al., 2021). This data illustrates the importance of the Nyekar tradition in the social and cultural context of the surrounding cemetery.

Several previous studies relevant to this research topic have been conducted. Previous research can be categorized into two categories. First, research that explores the Nyekar tradition in various locations and cultural contexts (Ayuningtyas, 2017; Wahid et al., 2018; Wulandari, 2021). This category documents the Nyekar tradition in specific areas with a focus on religious aspects and related cultural values. These studies provide a profound understanding of the importance of religious factors and cultural sustainability in preserving the Nyekar tradition. This includes aspects such as the role of tradition in strengthening social relationships (Maulana, 2015; Setiawan, 2016), maintaining cultural identity (Yuwono, 2016), as well as being a platform for interaction and sharing within the community (Mutmainnah, 2009).

Secondly, there is a category of research that investigates the adaptation of cultural

traditions during crises or social changes (Mufarida, 2021; Tradisi, 2022; Zainuri & Fitriani, 2021). Studies in this category examine the adaptation of cultural traditions during the pandemic, focusing on changes in the execution of traditions, the role of technology, and the resulting social impacts. These studies provide insights into how cultural traditions can adapt and endure in the face of significant changes.

From these two categories, it can be understood that previous research has made diverse contributions to understanding the Nyekar tradition and its adaptation during crises or social changes. However, this research will focus on the Nyekar tradition in Sirnaraga Public Cemetery, with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of the sustainability of this tradition in that location and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on its implementation.

The objective of this research is to identify and analyze the strategies used to maintain the Nyekar tradition during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study aims to gain a profound understanding of the efforts made by the community to preserve the continuity of the Nyekar tradition amidst the challenges faced during the pandemic. This research also aims to uncover the impact of the implemented strategies in sustaining this tradition.

Through these objectives, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to understanding the strategies employed to preserve the Nyekar tradition during the pandemic. The findings of this research are anticipated to provide valuable recommendations and guidance to support the preservation of cultural traditions during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Methods

This research was conducted at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery, a public cemetery located in a specific area. Sirnaraga Public Cemetery was chosen as the research location because it has a rich and diverse Nyekar tradition. Additionally, Sirnaraga Public Cemetery is also a primary destination for the surrounding community during the Ramadan period. The strong presence of the Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery makes this location highly relevant for understanding and documenting the tradition in-depth.

The research participants consisted of individuals and groups involved in the Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery. Participant sampling was conducted using purposive sampling techniques. Participants were selected based on criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as age, gender, and role in the implementation of the Nyekar tradition. Therefore, the participants involved in this research have a profound understanding of the Nyekar tradition and can provide valuable insights in describing the tradition and its adaptation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data collection was carried out through several techniques, including participant observation, interviews, and visual documentation. Participant observation was conducted by actively participating in the Nyekar tradition, allowing the researcher to directly observe the activities conducted by the participants, take notes on experiences and interactions, and gain a deep understanding of the tradition's context. Interviews were conducted with participants who had a profound understanding of the Nyekar tradition, such as community leaders or family members actively involved in the tradition. These interviews provided a space for participants to share their perspectives, experiences, and understanding of the Nyekar tradition. Additionally, visual documentation in the form of photos and videos was also conducted to visually document the implementation of the Nyekar tradition and provide concrete evidence in the research data analysis.

Results and Discussion

1. What is the Nyekar Tradition?

The term “Nyekar” originates from the Javanese word “sekar,” which means flowers. Nyekar, in its terminology, refers to the act of scattering flowers when visiting someone’s grave. Nyekar itself has existed for a long time and is not necessarily performed before Ramadan. Visiting graves can be done at any time as a way to remember death. In fact, the Prophet said that the best way to increase faith is through visiting graves or remembering death.

The Nyekar tradition is born from the cultural acculturation of Islam and Javanese beliefs. In Javanese belief, spirits are eternal and always “return” to visit their families every month of “Ruwah” (in the Islamic calendar known as Sha’ban). Ruwah comes from the word “Arwah,” the plural form of “Ruh,” which means spirit. The Javanese people in the past believed that at the end of Sha’ban, the spirits of the deceased would return to the world to visit their families. Therefore, that month is considered a good month for pilgrimage before Ramadan.

The Nyekar tradition is usually performed before the month of Ramadan and also on the day of Eid al-Fitr, specifically after the Eid prayer. However, it is important to note certain aspects of visiting graves to avoid religious violations. In this tradition, it is sufficient to greet and pray for the deceased by reciting Surah Al-Fatihah. However, people often scatter flowers and sprinkle water on the graves.

According to M. Salim in his writing, the Nyekar tradition is mentioned in a hadith where the Prophet allowed or encouraged his followers to visit graves and pray for the deceased, which would bring rewards for both the one reciting and the one being recited for, reminding them of death. Therefore, Nyekar graves are recommended by the Prophet Muhammad, and praying for the deceased is also a command from Allah to remember death (Jamhari, 2000).

According to Prima and Maharani in their paper titled “The Tradition of Ziarah Kubro in the Community of Palembang City from the Perspective of Max Scheler’s Hierarchy of Values,” it is mentioned that the tradition of Ziarah Kubro is performed before the month of Ramadan, specifically during the last 10 days of the month of Syakban, which is 10 days before Ramadan. Until now, the tradition of Ziarah Kubro has remained intact (Prima & Maharani, 2018).

2. Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The pandemic itself is an epidemic that has spread to various continents and countries, generally affecting many people. An epidemic is a term used to describe a sudden increase in the number of disease cases in a specific population area. The impact of this pandemic is not only limited to small aspects of life but also extends to larger aspects. Indeed, all countries around the world have experienced its effects.

Despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, it did not bring the Nyekar tradition to a complete halt. This tradition is not only about religious matters but also encompasses economic, social, and cultural aspects. The strong cultural element keeps this tradition running smoothly.

Unlike the previous year when Sirnaraga Public Cemetery was closed to visitors for grave pilgrimage, this year, due to the decrease in Covid-19 spread in Indonesia, the government reopened the cemetery for visitors to perform their grave visits. This research

is based on my personal experience as a visitor to Sirnaraga Public Cemetery, starting from before the pandemic until now. Thus, I am able to explain the differences or changes in the Nyekar tradition that occurred before and after the pandemic. It can be said that there have been several changes in the implementation of the Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery over the years.

These changes can be observed in terms of habits, such as the obligation to comply with the government's "new normal" policy, which requires people to adopt new habits when engaging in activities, especially in public places like visiting Sirnaraga Public Cemetery. One of the new habits is wearing a mask when in public. Additionally, there are changes in the aspect of communication space. Previously, communication could be conducted without spatial limitations, but now there are limitations in terms of maintaining distance to prevent the spread of Covid-19, according to the government's social distancing program. It is not only limited to physical distance but also to the duration of face-to-face communication.

Despite these aforementioned changes, the Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery still continues as usual, without any changes in the traditional implementation. Typically, the Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery in Bandung is performed in the days leading up to Ramadan and after Ramadan. The ritual process remains the same, with prayers for the deceased recited at their graves, including recitations from the Quran. Afterward, flowers are scattered and water is poured directly onto the graves.

3. Sustaining the Nyekar Tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery during the Pandemic

The Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery in Bandung has demonstrated its strong resilience despite social changes and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research findings indicate that this tradition has not undergone significant changes during the pandemic, with the majority of participants continuing to practice the tradition as usual. This highlights the resilience and adaptation of the community in the face of pandemic-induced changes. These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the potential high sustainability of cultural traditions, particularly when they have strong roots in religious, economic, social, and cultural aspects.

The Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery is supported by important factors that contribute to its sustainability. From a religious perspective, this tradition holds deep spiritual meaning and value for the local community. Participants believe that visiting and tending to the graves of their ancestors is an obligation as an act of respect and devotion. The economic aspect also plays a significant role, as the tradition provides economic opportunities for local traders who offer products and services during the practice of the tradition. Socially, the Nyekar tradition serves as an important moment to strengthen social bonds among family members and the community. It brings together extended family members to share, gather, and commemorate their ancestors. Moreover, culturally, the Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery has become an inseparable part of the local cultural identity, preserving a heritage that has been passed down through generations.

This research provides a deeper understanding of the sustainability of the Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery amid the Covid-19 pandemic. These findings support previous research that emphasizes the importance of religious, economic, social, and cultural factors in maintaining cultural traditions. The implications of these findings can be used as a basis for preserving and promoting the sustainability of the Nyekar

tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery and strengthening efforts to preserve and promote important cultural traditions for the local community.

The Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Public Cemetery has persisted despite the Covid-19 pandemic, showcasing the resilience and adaptation of the community in the face of significant changes during this global crisis. Several factors may explain the sustainability of this tradition during the pandemic.

Firstly, the Nyekar tradition has strong roots in religious aspects. For those who practice this tradition, Nyekar is not just a visit to ancestral graves but also an act of devotion to God and a form of respect for the spirits of ancestors. The religious aspect inherent in this tradition provides a strong motivation for people to continue practicing Nyekar despite the limitations and risks brought about by the pandemic.

Additionally, the Nyekar tradition has strong social and cultural values. It serves as a gathering moment for extended families, relatives, and the local community. Despite the restrictions and health protocols that need to be followed during the pandemic, people still strive to maintain the social and cultural essence of the Nyekar tradition. They can use technology such as video calls or social media to stay connected and share experiences with family and relatives who cannot be physically present. In this way, the social and cultural values of the Nyekar tradition are preserved and adapted to the existing conditions.

The sustainability of the Nyekar tradition during the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates a high level of resilience and togetherness within the community. Despite the significant changes brought about by the pandemic in daily life, cultural traditions like Nyekar remain an important part of the community's identity and life. In challenging situations like a pandemic, cultural traditions can provide the stability, continuity, and sense of togetherness needed by the community to face shared challenges.

Conclusion

The Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Cemetery in Bandung has persisted strongly despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of participants have continued to practice the tradition with strong sustainability, demonstrating the resilience and adaptation of the community in response to the changes brought about by the pandemic. Factors such as religion, social, and cultural aspects play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of this tradition. The Nyekar tradition at Sirnaraga Cemetery has deep roots in religious aspects, with visiting ancestral graves seen as a spiritual obligation and a form of respect for ancestors. Additionally, the social and cultural aspects foster togetherness and preserve the values of the tradition through the gathering of extended families and the local community. Although adaptations in the implementation of the tradition may occur, Nyekar remains an important part of the community's identity and life, providing stability and continuity amidst challenging circumstances.

As a qualitative study with a fieldwork approach, this research has several limitations. First, caution must be exercised when generalizing the findings as the research was conducted in a specific location, namely Sirnaraga Public Cemetery in Bandung, and the results may not directly apply to Nyekar traditions in other locations. Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling may impact the representativeness of the participants involved in this research. Additionally, this study is limited to the perspectives of Nyekar tradition practitioners and may not fully capture the viewpoints of other stakeholders involved in the tradition, such as local authorities or the surrounding community of Sirnaraga Public Cemetery. Therefore, further research with a broader scope is needed to

obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the Nyekar tradition and its adaptations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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