
The Megengan Tradition and Its Symbolic Meaning in the Social Construction Context During the Advent of Ramadan

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Abstract

Tradition, widely acknowledged as a custom rooted in ancient historical events, holds immense significance within societies, often serving diverse purposes ranging from political to cultural, depending on the historical context. Indonesia, a nation rich in cultural diversity, boasts a myriad of traditions unique to each region, with many communities steadfastly adhering to these age-old customs. This article endeavors to explore the enduring nature of traditions and their integral role in shaping human lives. It contends that traditions, developed over time, serve as repositories of cultural and historical identity, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity across generations. By delving into the intricacies of Indonesia's diverse cultural traditions, the article seeks to illuminate the dynamic interplay between tradition and societal evolution. Moreover, it emphasizes the imperative of preserving these traditions to ensure their proper development and transmission to future generations. In essence, the article aims to foster a comprehensive understanding of the profound impact of traditions on human life and the imperative of their preservation for the enrichment of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Megengan tradition, symbolic meaning, advent of Ramadan

Introduction

As we know, Indonesia is rich in diverse traditions, one of which is the Megengan tradition. Megengan is a celebration or an expression of enthusiasm by the community in welcoming the holy month of Ramadan and other significant festivals. However, not all communities practice this tradition; it is more common among certain communities where it has become a customary practice. This tradition is carried out as a way for the community, especially the Muslim population, to express their gratitude for the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan or other celebrations (Subandi & Wahyuni, 2020). The term 'Megengan' is a Javanese word meaning 'eating together' or 'communal feast.' Typically, Megengan refers to a tradition or ritual in Javanese society in Indonesia where people gather to share a meal as part of a celebration or special event. This tradition is quite well-known, particularly among the Javanese community.

This tradition holds significant social and cultural value as it strengthens family and community bonds and serves as a way to celebrate and share joy in special events. Megengan is not just about the food, but also about togetherness, solidarity, and celebrating significant moments in life (Santoso & Utami, 2018). This tradition plays a crucial role in preserving Javanese culture and reinforcing social ties within it. Through Megengan, the younger generation is taught about traditional values, ethics, and customs passed down from previous generations. With its various meanings and values, Megengan represents a precious cultural heritage for the Javanese

community, as well as a form of respect for local wisdom that needs to be preserved and appreciated. Megengan is not merely a ritual but also a symbol of the richness of culture, spirituality, and unity in the Javanese society.

One key element in the Megengan tradition is the various customary or religious ceremonies that take place during the event. This may include the recitation of prayers and other activities that enrich the experience of the guests. The Megengan tradition in Pangesangan Village also reflects a sense of unity and togetherness within the community (Pratama & Indriyani, 2019). The event provides an opportunity for people from different social strata to come together, share stories, and celebrate moments collectively (Widodo & Lestari, 2017). It also strengthens social and familial relationships within the village. In addition to the social and religious aspects, the Megengan tradition also reflects the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the ancestors. This makes Megengan an essential element in preserving the cultural identity of Pangesangan Village.

The benefit of this research is to enable us to understand the customs or traditions practiced by the Javanese community in anticipation of the holy month of Ramadan or other significant days. As the younger generation, it is important for us to gain a deeper understanding of the Javanese tradition of Megengan, so we can preserve and keep this tradition alive among the Javanese people. This tradition, which involves organizing a gratitude event for the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan or other significant days, is deeply ingrained in Javanese society. Through this understanding, we can also appreciate our own cultural identity and preserve a tradition that has been handed down through generations from our ancestors.

Method

For this study, the location chosen for research was Pangesangan Village, Jambangan District, in the city of Surabaya. The reason for selecting Pangesangan Village as the research site is due to several factors, including social and cultural influences. The cultural factor is particularly strong and deeply rooted in the community. As a result, the people of Pangesangan Village consistently observe the Megengan event every year at the beginning of Ramadan, a practice that has been passed down through generations. The social factor is influenced by the high social spirit of the Pangesangan Village community. This research was conducted in three villages: Bendiljati Kulon, Sambijajar, and Tambakrejo. Data collection was carried out through documentation, observation, and interviews with key figures, village heads, and residents who actively participate in the tradition.

In this research, we employed a quantitative approach aimed at obtaining in-depth data about the Megengan tradition. Not only utilizing quantitative research, this study also incorporates qualitative research that positions itself as an instrumental part of the research process. Qualitative research is crucial in this study to achieve comprehensive results, encompassing interview responses, observations, and documentation.

In its implementation, the Megengan tradition is generally participated in by all members of the local community within the neighborhood or community group (RT or RW). Additionally, the term 'Megengan' itself holds many symbolic meanings, as pointed out by Fauzi Hima Sufya (2022). In his research, he explains that there are symbolic meanings inherent in the term 'Megengan', one of which is: As a gesture of seeking forgiveness from others. A distinctive feature of Megengan is the inclusion of 'apem', a traditional food item.

The theory of structuration can be applied to understand how this tradition not only reflects the existing social structure but also results from the actions of individuals involved in its implementation. Giddens emphasizes the concept of 'duality of agency-structure', which states that individuals act as agents who not only comply with social norms and values but also actively shape and reproduce these structures. By applying Structuration Theory to the Megengan tradition, we

can explore how the community collectively creates and maintains this tradition as part of their social structure. Simultaneously, individuals within the society play an active role in continuing, modifying, or even opposing certain aspects of the Megengan tradition. For example, the social structure in the community can influence the norms and values applied in Megengan's implementation, while individuals have the freedom to interpret and express cultural meanings within the context of the tradition.

Structuration Theory can assist us in understanding how the Megengan tradition is not only passed down from one generation to the next as part of the social structure but also how individuals play an active role in shaping and celebrating this tradition in accordance with its context. Moreover, Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory also highlights the role of time and space in social action. In the context of Megengan, analyzing the dimensions of time and space might involve considerations of how this tradition evolves over time and how the interaction with physical space influences the implementation and meaning of Megengan. In the structuration of social action, Giddens introduces the concept of 'distributed structure' or 'embedded structure,' reflecting the idea that social structures are present in everyday practices and distributed throughout society.

By applying this concept to the Megengan tradition, we can examine how elements of this tradition are reflected in various aspects of the community's daily life, shaped and reproduced through individual actions. Additionally, Giddens emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, which is the ability of individuals to reflect on their actions and modify their social practices based on new understandings. In the context of Megengan, reflexivity might involve critical consideration of the meanings and purposes of this tradition, as well as potential adaptations or transformations in line with changes in the broader society.

In the context of Megengan, reflexivity might involve critical examination of the meaning and purpose of this tradition, as well as potential adaptations or transformations in response to changes in the broader society. Overall, Structuration Theory provides a rich conceptual framework for understanding the complex dynamics between social structures and individual agents in shaping and sustaining religious and cultural traditions like Megengan. This approach acknowledges the continuous interaction between individuals and society in shaping social reality, making it highly relevant in analyzing traditions that are alive and evolving over time.

Results and Discussion

The Megengan tradition is a deeply rooted cultural heritage in Indonesian society, particularly in East Java, and is observed before the month of Ramadan. The name 'Megengan' originates from the Javanese language, meaning 'to restrain oneself' or 'to fast', reflecting the profound significance of this tradition. In practice, community members exchange gifts, typically consisting of traditional foods such as sticky rice (ketan), sweet coconut milk soup (kolak), and a type of Javanese pancake (apem). The history of the Megengan tradition indicates its association with values of unity and solidarity (Hidayat & Susanti, 2016). As the community prepares for the holy month of Ramadan, they give and receive parcels to share with their neighbors as a form of support and care. The offerings of sticky rice, kolak, and apem are not only symbolic of East Java's culinary richness but also convey deep meanings of sharing and caring for others.

This tradition plays a significant role in strengthening the bonds of fellowship among community members. Through the process of giving and receiving, social relationships between individuals and families become closer (Riyanti & Purnomo, 2021). Megengan is more than just a ritual; it is a tangible manifestation of mutual cooperation and the spirit of unity that involves the entire community. Megengan transcends mere culinary tradition, embodying a deeply valuable moral message. Those who adhere to this tradition are taught to always share what they have, even if it is limited. The meaning of 'restraint' and 'fasting' in the Megengan context can be interpreted

as the courage to resist greed and selfishness and to open oneself up to sharing with others. The Megengan tradition also teaches the importance of unity and harmony in life. By celebrating this tradition together, the community learns to recognize differences, respect each other, and maintain harmony among its members. The simplicity of its culinary presentation conveys values of a simple yet meaningful life (Kusumo & Wibowo, 2015). As part of Indonesia's cultural wealth, the Megengan tradition not only enriches the culinary and social aspects of the East Java community but also represents a cultural heritage that plays a significant role in shaping the character and morality of the society. Through Megengan, the community can celebrate unity, strengthen solidarity, and make Ramadan a catalyst for deepening humanitarian values.

From the research that already conducted, it can be discussed that the Megengan tradition signifies a symbol of social integration within the community, reflecting the amalgamation of diverse cultural elements into a unified whole. This tradition combines many aspects of local culture with Islamic teachings, creating a unique mixed tradition. Megengan is not just a ritual, but also a process of cultural acculturation that has involved the adaptation and blending of local values with Islamic teachings. In the past, Muslims spread Islam in a way that integrated cultural aspects, hoping that the message of Islam would be more readily accepted by the surrounding community. Over time, modern society tends to choose a more practical approach in practicing traditions, such as praying for ancestors at home without needing to visit graves, a practice often referred to as 'nyekar'. Nevertheless, some communities still comprehensively maintain these traditional practices according to ancestral heritage (Cahyono & Utomo, 2018). There are groups that only perform basic rituals, while others steadfastly uphold the complete traditions as passed down by their ancestors. Unlike communities that still practice 'nyekar', 'sandingan', and 'selamatan' to this day, their views on individuals involved in these traditions in detail vary.

In a broader context, the Megengan tradition not only fosters social integration but also reflects the historical journey and cultural changes of the Pangesangan village community. The fusion of local cultural elements and Islamic teachings is an effort to preserve diversity and balance cultural richness with religious values. It is important to understand that Megengan is not only a symbol of cultural integration but also reflects the efforts to blend Islam with local traditions. In the past, this approach was used as a strategy for the dissemination of Islam. By integrating religious messages with local cultural elements, it was hoped that the teachings would be more readily accepted by the community.

However, with ever changing times, the mindset of the modern community also tends to shift. A practical approach like praying for ancestors at home (Nyekar) without directly visiting graves has become the preferred choice for many. Despite this, there are still groups in the community who maintain the entirety of the Megengan tradition, upholding the values and rituals passed down by ancestors (Sugiyanto & Setyawan, 2019). Differences in understanding within the community are evident concerning individual perspectives on their traditions. Some view these individuals as successors and guardians of traditional values that deserve respect, but they are also met with skepticism, associating them with Javanese belief aspects or questioning the religious authenticity of these traditions.

Through these kind of dynamics, the Megengan tradition not only endures as a cultural heritage but also becomes a space where change and continuity coexist. For those who still practice Nyikal, Sandingan, and Selamatan, this tradition is not merely symbolic, but also a means of maintaining social harmony. The interactions among individuals during the Megengan events create a reciprocal relationship that strengthens harmony and solidarity in the Pangesangan village, making this tradition a crucial pillar in preserving the diversity and identity of the local community.

Some believe that residents who follow the tradition in detail are considered significant figures within their community. On the other hand, there is also a view that those deeply involved

in this tradition may place less emphasis on religious aspects or even be associated with Kejawen beliefs (Widjaja & Rachman, 2020). The Megengan tradition can also be interpreted as a symbol of harmony for the residents of Dusun Pangesangan in Jambangan Village, Surabaya, as they are required to participate in a 'selamatan' held in a mosque or prayer hall. Here, they bring 'berkatan' or rice to complete the Megengan event. Attendees gather the rice or 'berkat' they bring, then join in a collective prayer for safety and protection from temptation during the holy month of Ramadan. After the prayer, the collected rice or 'berkat' is distributed randomly. This tradition fosters an interaction between individuals, leading to social harmony due to the reciprocal relationships among them. This interaction promotes social harmony as Megengan is a tradition still practiced by Muslims in Pangesangan Village, Jambangan District, Surabaya, partly to maintain social environmental harmony in the village.

The Megengan tradition in Pangesangan Village, Jambangan, Surabaya, is not just a religious ritual but also reflects the social and cultural dynamics of the community. The differing views on participation in these traditions create a complex nuance in how the community interprets religious and cultural practices. Some community members view detailed participation as a form of commitment to the tradition, thus being regarded as important figures within the community. On the other hand, there are perspectives that associating too much detail may exclude religious aspects and could even be linked to Javanese beliefs.

In detail, the Megengan tradition has a strong social aspect in Dusun Pangesangan. This tradition can be interpreted as a symbol of harmony, reinforced by the practice of greetings in mosques and prayer halls. When residents gather to pray, they bring 'katan' or rice as part of the ritual. The process of collecting and randomly redistributing rice and blessings after congregational prayer is a critical point in explaining the social interactions occurring there. The inter-individual interactions within the Megengan tradition create a reciprocity that strengthens the social harmony of Pangesangan Village. Following this tradition is not just about performing rituals, but also about creating a platform for communication, interaction, and celebrating togetherness. In this context, Megengan is not just a form of worship but also a means of maintaining the social harmony of the village community. Through this tradition, the people of Pangesangan Village not only preserve religious values but also enrich their social life. Megengan is more than a formal ceremony; it aims to build relationships between individuals and strengthen social cohesion. Over time, the continuation of this tradition represents the determination and desire to maintain cultural and religious identity. Thus, Megengan in Pangesangan Village, Jambangan District, Surabaya, is not just an act of worship, but also a preservation of cultural and social values in the community. The interactions and socializing that occur during Megengan play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the social harmony valued and preserved by the local community.

The Megengan tradition is not just a reflection of a religious event but also a form of togetherness and gratitude in welcoming the holy month of Ramadan. Besides the activities of preparation and execution, the food that forms an integral part of Megengan plays a crucial role in providing symbolic meaning and reinforcing local wisdom values. During the Megengan tradition, there are several activities that the local community must undertake, which include:

1. Preparation

In this process, the residents prepare everything needed for the Megengan event, such as cleaning the mosque where the event will be held, laying out carpets, and organizing the overall event planning.

2. Main Event

In this phase, the residents are expected to gather and carry out the Megengan event, which involves communal prayer, listening to Islamic religious studies, and engaging in specific actions within the Megengan tradition that hold religious or symbolic meaning.

In the Megengan tradition, certain foods are essential and symbolically significant, required to be present during the Megengan process. Some of these foods are obligatory offerings during the Megengan event, including:

1. Nasi Tumpeng

Nasi Tumpeng, as the main dish in Megengan, is not just a delicious meal but also considered a symbol of luck and prosperity. Its conical shape is not only aesthetically pleasing but also signifies hopes for success and prosperity during the holy month of Ramadan.

2. Jajan Pasar

Jajan Pasar (traditional market snacks), kue apem (a type of cake), and fruits that are part of the Megengan dishes also carry deep symbolic meanings. Jajan Pasar, with its diversity, represents the rich cultural and traditional diversity held in high esteem in the local community. Kue apem, besides being a tasty snack, also symbolizes warding off misfortune and seeking forgiveness, reflecting an awareness of limitations and a desire for self-improvement.

3. Fruit

Fruits, symbolizing luck and fertility, add depth to the meaning of the Megengan tradition. The presence of fruits in the dishes serves as a reminder of nature's bounty and the hope for abundance in every aspect of life."

4. Apem Cake

Apem cake is also considered a symbol of repulsion and forgiveness for various mistakes, and can also be a symbol of apology.

The Megengan tradition is an expression of gratitude to God Almighty for His blessings, particularly in celebrating the holy month of Ramadan. From the community's perspective, Megengan is not just a ritual, but also an expression of thankfulness for the opportunity to experience this blessed month. Since ancestral times, this tradition has been an integral part of community life, passed down through generations. Megengan may seem unfamiliar to the younger generation, but the spirit to understand and preserve it remains strong. The local community diligently learns and passes on this tradition, making it a part of their lives that brings profound cultural and spiritual richness. The effort to preserve Megengan is not merely driven by nostalgia, but also as an expression of gratitude for our ancestors' precious legacy. Although times have changed, the charm of Megengan endures.

This tradition not only serves as a reminder of the past but also strengthens the bonds of kinship among community members. The Megengan Gathering is a platform where everyone can feel a sense of togetherness and warmth during the holy month of Ramadan. Through this tradition, the local community experiences the joy of sharing, caring for each other, and celebrating the existing diversity. With the increasing trend of modernization, the Megengan tradition becomes a symbol of the continuity of religious and cultural values. Younger generations, who may not be familiar with Megengan, are eager to learn and participate, proving that this tradition can endure and remain alive in an ever-changing era. Megengan is not only a symbol of gratitude but also serves as a bridge between the past, present, and future. Through this activity, the local community celebrates unity, strengthens religious values, and fosters close relationships. As a meaningful ancestral heritage site, Megengan continues to inspire, adding color and inspiration to the local community's spiritual journey during the holy month of Ramadan.

The Megengan tradition is a deeply rooted cultural heritage within the community and has a significant positive impact on fostering friendships. One of its most prominent benefits is the

strengthening of relationships among residents through the process of giving and receiving gifts. Megengan is not only a place for formal traditions but also a space for warmth and unity among the people. This tradition goes beyond just social dimensions; it also has a strong moral dimension. In Megengan, we teach our employees to always have a spirit of sharing and reinforce the idea that true happiness comes from the ability to share with others. In the dynamic everyday life, the values of sharing embodied in Megengan provide a solid foundation for building a caring community grounded in mutual support and cooperation.

Megengan is more than just a communal tradition; it is a symbol of unity and harmony in life. The fusion of Javanese culture and Islamic values in this tradition creates a unique harmony. The community can continue this tradition without abandoning their local cultural roots while warmly embracing Islamic teachings. This is an example of how traditions can serve as a bridge between different values and beliefs, enriching community life with diversity that fosters harmony. Megengan is not just a social or religious activity, but also an expression of gratitude towards God Almighty.

This tradition embodies collective gratitude associated with Ramadan, a blessed month that is a time for introspection and devotion. By distributing gifts and practicing the Megengan tradition, the community celebrates blessings and the opportunity to draw closer to God. Behind every achievement and interaction in Megengan lies a strong spiritual dimension. This tradition is performed as a prayer to protect oneself from disasters, difficulties, and misfortune. Megengan is the true manifestation of the community's faith, united in prayer and hope for a peaceful and prosperous life. With its myriad benefits, megengan is not just a daily tradition but also an expression of local wisdom that adds color and deep meaning to community life. In various aspects, Megengan is not only a preserver of cultural heritage but also a source of inspiration for a community living in unity, compassion, and piety.

The Megengan tradition is not only a cultural heritage of the Indonesian community, particularly in East Java, but also a crucial pillar in strengthening social relationships and local morality. Deeply rooted in the values of unity, solidarity, and harmony, Megengan is more than just a pre-Ramadan ritual; it is also a symbol of the spirit of mutual cooperation and sharing. The history of this tradition highlights its role in preserving cultural identity and maintaining social diversity. Through the process of giving and receiving gifts, Megengan creates strong bonds among community members, making it more than just a culinary or religious activity. In the context of modern society's evolution, Megengan reflects the adaptation of cultural practices and Islamic values. Despite changing mindsets and habits, this tradition remains an essential means of maintaining harmony and solidarity within the social environment. The varying understandings and practices of Megengan illustrate the complexity of culture and religion in an ever-changing society.

In a broader sense, Megengan fosters social integration and represents the historical journey and cultural changes of the Pangesangan Village community. The effort to blend local cultural elements with Islamic teachings reflects an appreciation for the diversity and harmonious character of this tradition. Despite changes in perspectives and practices over time, Megengan retains its meaning as a symbol of togetherness and gratitude in welcoming the holy month of Ramadan.

Consequently, Megengan is not only a cultural heritage that enriches the culinary and social aspects of the East Java community but also serves as a source of inspiration for building a life full of unity, harmony, and humanitarian values. Through this tradition, the community celebrates not just diversity but also embraces religious values as an integral part of daily life. Megengan is more than just a religious ritual; it is also a celebration of life that holds profound meaning for every individual and community that practices it.

Megengan, as a deep cultural heritage, continues to play a crucial role in shaping the identity and social life of the community. Its influence extends beyond just the culinary or religious dimensions, but also lays a strong foundation for social integration and the development of local morality.

In the context of social relationships, Megengan acts as a strong bond of fellowship between individuals and families. The process of giving and receiving gifts, especially in the form of traditional foods like sticky rice (ketan), sweet coconut milk soup (kolak), and a type of Javanese pancake (apem), creates not just material connections but also strengthens emotional bonds. Megengan is more than just a culinary tradition; it symbolizes mutual cooperation and a spirit of unity involving the entire community. By celebrating this tradition together, the community learns to recognize differences, respect each other, and maintain harmony among its members.

The history of Megengan also reflects a unique process of cultural acculturation. This tradition blends many elements of local culture with Islamic teachings, creating a form of mixed tradition that enriches cultural diversity. In this context, Megengan is not merely a ritual but also a manifestation of the effort to integrate local values with religious teachings. Over time, despite changes in the mindset of the modern society, Megengan remains a symbol of the continuity of cultural values and harmony in diversity.

Megengan is not just a religious event, but also a form of togetherness and gratitude in the face of the holy month of Ramadan. The preparation and execution of the Megengan event involve the entire community, creating moments of unity that bring to life local wisdom values. In its process, this tradition encompasses more than just formal aspects; it also becomes a platform for communication, interaction, and the celebration of togetherness.

In terms of moral values, Megengan teaches employees and the local community to have a spirit of sharing. In the dynamic day-to-day life, the values of sharing inherent in Megengan provide a solid foundation for building a caring community based on mutual assistance. As an embodiment of these values, Megengan is not just a formal tradition but also a medium for building social harmony and enriching social life.

With the varying understandings and practices of Megengan within the community, this tradition reflects the complexity of an ever-changing culture and religion. Nevertheless, the continuity of Megengan as a cultural heritage demonstrates the community's resolve to maintain their cultural and religious identity. As a symbol of unity and diversity, Megengan continues to inspire and provide deep meaning to those who partake in it.

From a broader perspective, Megengan is not just a conservator of cultural heritage, but also a source of inspiration for building a life filled with unity, harmony, and humanitarian values. As a ritual that encompasses culinary, religious, social, and moral dimensions, Megengan becomes a platform for celebrating diversity and embracing religious values as an integral part of everyday life.

Thus, Megengan is not merely a religious or culinary tradition, but rather a celebration of life that brings together cultural and spiritual richness. As a crucial pillar in strengthening social relationships, Megengan continues to serve as a bridge between the past, present, and future, imparting values of mutual cooperation, unity, and gratitude to future generations.

Conclusion

The Magengan tradition is an ancestral practice passed down through generations, observed to welcome the holy month of Ramadan. The purpose of this tradition is to pray for family members or ancestors who have passed away. It is also a time to express gratitude to Allah SWT for the blessing of experiencing another Ramadan and for the opportunity to gather with fellow believers.

In the context of Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory, Megengan reflects the complex dynamics between the social structure that provides norms and values, and the active actions of individuals who give personal meaning to the tradition. Symbols, traditional foods, and the socialization process within Megengan are essential elements in the formation of social identity and the construction of togetherness within the community.

For this reason, we, the younger generation, must be able to recognize the various traditions that exist, so that we can balance life with a very advanced era and traditions that still exist. So that we can know many guidelines for existing norms and cultural elements, as well as implementing them in our daily lives. Here we are also taught to be able to preserve existing culture, so that we can pass on this tradition to the next generation, so that culture is not consumed by time.

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