

THE "*BEGEPEN*" TRADITION AS A SYMBOL OF PEACE AND UNIVERSITY IN THE EFFORT OF STRENGTHENING THE NATION'S SELF IN THE TRADITIONAL SERVICES OF THE ODUNG BAORAJA TRIBE

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ABSTRACT

The ritual of the peaceful banquet is one of the growing and still robust traditions, maintained in almost all areas in Lembata. In the east of Atadei, the ritual of a peaceful banquet known as 'begepen'. Odung is one of the clans in Atadei that is still maintaining the begepen ritual. Begepen is held in every ritual that involves all members of the clan. Begepen is a central ritual for family members when entering the clan's house (una rayan). The ritual is held to gather all family members and their forefathers. Begepen is a family's peaceful banquet based on a lovely sense and strong presence among the family members. In addition, this concept contains values described as similarity, brotherhood, openness and forgiveness. Begepen is a forefather heir tradition that improves each mistake, unites, and tightens the brotherhood among the clan members with their forefather. A form of brotherhood is once again an attempt to strengthen the identity of members of the Odung clan, particularly Indonesians. It indicates that the people in Atadei are still very strong in maintaining and performing the tradition that offers the values of courtesy as a national glorious culture.

Keywords: *begepen, national identity, peace, odung tribe*

INTRODUCTION

The tsunami that hit Waiteba, Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara Province in 1979, caused members of the Odung tribe and several other tribes in Baoraja, Atadei sub-district, to eventually spread to several areas both inside and outside Lembata. Most Odung tribal families were evacuated to Loang, the capital of Nagawutung sub-district. Since most of the Odung family lives in Loang, it was decided to move the traditional house of the 'Odung' tribe to Loang (Odung, 2002). All traditions and processions at each traditional ceremony remain original and in line with what has been passed down from generation to generation (Alam, 1997). In order to gather and unite the Odung tribe members scattered throughout Indonesia, it was decided to hold a tribal reunion event every five years. Several traditional ceremonial events include the entrance ceremony to the 'gew una Rayan' tribal house and the 'begepen' peace meal ceremony. The traditional house, or una rayan, is the main house of the tribal people. The house is a place to gather with tribal people at every traditional ceremony. The ceremony of entering the traditional tribal house is intended to reunite with relatives as one family and to ask for the blessing and blessing of the ancestors for all works in their respective places of duty while still serving the tribe as a unifying symbol and source of strength (Ginting, 2018). At the same time, Begepen teaches the values of togetherness,

brotherhood and strength. These values provide advice and direction for human safety in living their lives. These two ceremonies are carried out not only to unite tribal members, but also as a strategy to introduce early to the next generation of the Odung tribe all the processes of every traditional ceremony.

The peace meal ceremony is a tradition still maintained and carried out in almost every area of the Lembata district. In the kedang, the peace meal is known as 'mawu wowo tutuq toyeq'. In Lebatukan District, it is known as 'bet'ti gole'. In Ile Ape it is known as 'tapan holo huli boke'. While at Atadei, it is better known as 'begepen'. The begepen ritual is an integral part of every traditional ceremony. The begepen ceremony is an essential part of the Odung tribe's cultural fabric, particularly in the aftermath of the 1979 tsunami that displaced many members of the tribe. As families relocated within Indonesia, preserving their traditional customs, including the begepen ritual, became critical to maintaining their cultural identity. The ritual is primarily conducted to unite family members, honour ancestors, and promote peaceful relations within the clan. According to Moeliono (1991), customs are fundamental to a community's values and identity, and the begepen ceremony encapsulates these values through its symbolic practices.

Through the begepen ceremony, the Odung people honour their ancestors and reinforce their collective identity as part of the broader Indonesian nation. In such rituals, the tribe finds the strength to endure challenges and preserve its cultural heritage despite the influences of globalization (Smith & Tan, 2006). This study explores the cultural significance of begepen and its role in fostering peace and unity within the community.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the cultural significance of the begepen ceremony within the Odung tribe of Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara. Data collection involved direct field observations during the begepen ceremony, focusing on the ritual's structure, key actions, and symbolic objects used in the ceremony. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with tribal leaders and community members to gain insights into the symbolic meanings of the ritual and its role in promoting peace, unity, and cultural preservation. These interviews provided a deeper understanding of the community's perspectives on the ceremony's impact on tribal cohesion and intergenerational cultural transmission (Geertz, 1973; Manuaba, 1999). Relevant anthropological and cultural literature was reviewed, including works by Geertz (1973) and Manuaba (1999), which informed the analysis of the begepen ceremony within broader cultural and sociological frameworks. The data was analyzed through an interpretive lens, focusing on the symbolic functions of the ritual, such as the role of food offerings and prayers in fostering communal unity and strengthening cultural identity. This combination of ethnographic observation, interviews, and document analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the begepen ceremony and its significance within the Odung tribe and beyond.

FINDINGS

The 'begepen' ceremony is part of the original Lembata culture and ancestral heritage, which is guided directly by the 'ata beruin' (tribal chief) who understands customs and all matters related to customs. On the day of its implementation, all tribe members need to prepare the materials needed for the begepen ceremony, including:

1. *Kehaler* in the form of a medium tray woven from palm leaves
2. *Nowing* is a kind of sarong traditionally woven for men. Nowing is folded and placed in the haler

3. *Kenik* is rice. Prepared handfuls as food ingredients for peace rice. Rice is wrapped in 'kelomak' corn husks and placed on a sarong
4. *Candlenut*: One whole grain plus four whole grains of rice. The two are put together, wrapped and tucked between the folds of the nowing/holster
5. *Braha dua mongan*: eight rolls of white cotton, then rolled again and put together into two mongan with four rolls each
6. *Braha Tegan*: six cotton rolls and separated into three parts with two rolls each.

Ceremony in Front of the Entrance of the Tribal Traditional House

The begopen ceremony begins with a ceremonial ceremony in front of the entrance of the tribal traditional house, which is guided directly by the tribal chief. All tribe members carry out this ceremony solemnly. The event started by placing two Mongan bras on the right and left sides of the kehaler. Then, also put on the tension bra. Two tension bras are placed on the ground, which will then be placed on top of the halter. The other two middle brahas are placed to the north of the kehaler (the entrance to the big house), and the other two are placed to the south of the kehaler (the direction of the exit). Haler with begopen ingredients, placed on top of the tension bra in the middle. After the procession in front of the traditional house was completed, the tribal leader 'ata beruin' began to say a prayer asking for the ancestral blessing 'amet prat' as follows:

*Kem tedek gepar mio ina ama tua magu
 Nebe kem heri, kem begopen
 Ipo lolunge, hem kem waolem gane
 Kem uyo keniker, na lau khal tua mea
 Kem tibanga wain, di lau kono ehak
 Kem menunge tuak, noko mere kono ehak
 Gero jema be, ba nuhem deu gelikehe, elewem deu gewalet ke
 Gero jema be, ba no tuak neu burange ke
 Gero jema be, ba no keleruk neu belobeke en
 Keniri belolonge helaiti kem pekeng-tiwang dipo
 Tek gahip hi, tek bage hi
 Tek guat hi, tek hurat hi
 Keniring nor laite, kempil doke
 Maketi dor oleng kem bak moling*

The loose translation:

We convey to you the ancestors
 We serve this peace food for you
 We will cook and eat together
 We eat and drink together in one container
 And also drink in the same container
 We drink palm wine on the same tree
 Maybe in the past there was a wrong and painful word
 Maybe we were wrong in the past because we were drunk with palm wine and betel nut
 Misunderstanding all this time, this time we also leave
 Can't be counted, can't be divided
 We will not remember and repeat again
 We regret all the mistakes we have made

And now we are starting to renew ourselves

After finishing the prayer, kehaler and its contents are stored in the traditional houses. 'Kenik begepen' or peace rice is mixed with other raw rice and then cooked together. A red rooster is slaughtered and then cooked in a sauce without spices.

Peace Meal Ceremony '*kane begepen*' (explained what ingredients are served above the booth for megepen)

There are two important parts to this peace meal.

1. *Pau paraw ina ama tua magu* (feed the ancestors'). This is a form of respect for the ancestors. This ceremony begins by giving offerings in the form of small parts of the sacrificial animal, in this case, a chicken. Take a little meat from the heart, liver, toe tips, wing tips, the tip of the chicken's beak, plus a little rice and gravy. All offerings are placed above the booth and divided into four parts. Then the palm wine is poured four times, once for each portion of the dish. While pouring palm wine, the tribal chief recited the 'amet prat' prayer to the ancestors as follows:

Kem tedek gepar mio ina ama tua magu
Kem begem mio ga mol men mol
Ne pon kem ga puje men dor
Tea rebe kem gane kem kenik begepen

The loose translation:

We convey to you the ancestors

We serve you food and drinks first to eat

We eat and drink after you eat

Today is the day of unity by eating together for peace

2. Eat the peace of the 'begepen' family.

After finishing the prayer, the tribal chief began to eat first (ui ga nol) and then asked to eat (nepon oyan wihe ui dor) with all the tribe members. Those who cannot attend can be represented by mentioning their names and eating on their behalf as a sign that they are also present at this banquet. All the available food and drinks were spent together with joy and a feeling of togetherness.

"The Candlenut Breaking Ceremony" Asking for the Ancestral Blessing 'Beto Mirek – Dulat Kenitoh'

This ceremony was held the next day after the begepen ceremony. The Kenitoh Dulat process is the process of obtaining ancestral blessings through the hands of the tribal chief, by placing a symbol in the form of a cross on one's forehead. The candlenut and four grains of rice were taken at the 'begepen' ceremony yesterday, and the tribal chief broke the candlenut with a traditional crusher. The contents of the candlenut are chewed together with four grains of rice and three koter leaves. After being chewed, all the ingredients were removed and accommodated on a larger sheet of koter leaf. The chieftain was the first to dip the thumb of his right hand into the material and mark his forehead with a cross. All the tribe members lined up and one by one came forward to be slapped. The tribal members who were absent were pronounced by name in front of the tribal chief as a sign that the person concerned was also present at the 'dulat kenitoh' event.

DUSCUSSION

Globalisation certainly influences the sustainability of a region's customs. The sustainability of our culture is highly dependent on the community itself. This is the biggest

challenge to maintaining the existence of our local cultures. Its existence will be further eroded when we do not introduce the local cultures that we have to the next generation. With this Interpretative approach, Clifford Geertz sharpens the notion of culture as a system of conceptions inherited from previous generations and expressed in symbolic form with the help of humans to communicate, preserve and develop knowledge and attitudes towards life. Therefore, we must continuously introduce and teach them about the symbols of our culture and customs by involving children in every traditional ceremony. Here are the meanings and symbols of the objects used in the begeben ceremony:

1. *Kehaler*: in the form of a medium tray made of woven palm leaves as a symbol of all tribesmen being united and gathered in one place
2. *A nowing* or original woven sarong that is woven by oneself as a unifying symbol in one family bond
3. *Candlenut* as a wound healer and medicine. Symbol of forgiving and forgiving each other
4. *The four grains of rice* as a symbol of peace. The symbol of all who come from the four winds, united both in eating together and the sign of the *dulat kenitoh*
5. *Green broadleaf koter*, is a kind of forest tree with wide leaves that can accommodate dew and is also used as medicine. Symbolized as a reservoir of coolness. All citizens are united in freshness and coolness by keeping away anger, envy and swearing.
6. *Braha* is cotton as purity and sincerity.
7. *Pau paraw* means the process of giving food, offerings or offerings to ancestors.
8. *Konok* is a drinking container as a substitute for a glass made of coconut shell.
9. *Tuak* is a traditional drink made from palm trees, coconut and palm sugar.

The effect of modernisation, which is going so fast, has dramatically influenced our local culture. Our current generation is likelier to choose and love foreign cultures than their own. Their identity as a generation with regional culture is disappearing. This serious national problem needs to be addressed quickly, accurately and wisely. In every traditional ceremony, children are more likely to enjoy eating and drinking without fully understanding the traditional ceremony (Taum, 2016). Many noble values are obtained and used as a foothold in social life.

According to Manuaba (1999), when these realities and problems are not immediately anticipated, it is certain that our future generations will lose their cultural roots and foundations. They certainly will not have a clear national identity. They will lose their regional sense, soul, and spirit, as well as the spirit of Indonesia, because they are not embedded in these values. Manuaba's (1999) concern is evident by looking at the reality that is happening today. When this regeneration process does not work, the door to extinction is ready to open, swallowing all the culture and wealth of our region without being left behind, and we only become individuals who walk without our cultural footing and foundation. Therefore, children need to be involved in their community, where they realise their existence as autonomous and social beings. In their social community, they will learn about values, social systems, symbols, social norms and concepts that are useful and meaningful for themselves and their social groups. Humans communicate, preserve and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life through these things. Danandjaya (1997) states that there are four roles of regional culture, namely:

1. As a projection system (projective system) reflecting shared/collective ideals
2. As ratification of cultural institutions and institutions.
3. As a child education tool (Pedagogical device)

4. As a means of control so that the norms of society will always be obeyed by its collective members

The role of the begeben ceremony as a pedagogical device is also highlighted by Bachtiar (2004), who argues that cultural rituals teach values such as forgiveness, brotherhood, and social responsibility. These values are essential for building a cohesive society, not only within the tribe but also within the larger context of national identity. As Manuaba (1999) observes, preserving cultural practices is crucial for maintaining a sense of national pride and unity. In an indigenous community, a strong bond between culture and human life forms a sense of solidarity among members. Customary rules are important in regulating all activities, discourses, dialogues, and social discourses as a projection system to realise a common goal. In addition, customs are an essential factor in community identity and integration. Custom is a collective self-interpretation system that becomes a symbol in which people become aware of themselves and think about collective existence. In other words, custom is a projection of society in human consciousness. Thus, the cultural symbols will remain sustainable in the continuity of social life.

Danandjaja (1997) notes that folklore and traditions, such as the begeben, function as tools for teaching the younger generation about their cultural roots. The challenge, however, lies in ensuring that these traditions are passed down in a rapidly modernising world where younger generations may be more inclined toward external influences. The close relationship between society and culture has formed a close bond between customs, beliefs, society and culture. Begeben can be a tool to ratify a cultural institution. Children are the nation's next generation because in their hands the fate of our culture is at stake (Fadil, 2020). Modernisation has created a new culture, an instant-paced culture. This has a direct impact on the existence of our own culture. Therefore, cultural and local wisdom values must be intensively introduced and taught to our children to maintain our identity as a cultured nation (Ratu, 2011). This is because begeben has elements that cannot be separated from knowledge and education. Regional culture has customary rules that must be obeyed and carried out in an indigenous society. Begeben has rules that indirectly reflect the community's norms, which must be adhered to create a harmonious life between tribe members and society.

CONCLUSION

Behind the begeben ceremony in the traditional house of the Odung tribe, there is a deep meaning implicit and significant to learn, live and carry out. The implementation of the Begeben ceremony reflects the independence of the tribal community to interpret the values of brotherhood, togetherness, and peace, which are the local wisdom of the Lembata community in organising and building social glue for harmonious living together. Thus, the values of socio-cultural traditions can be systematically inherited from generation to generation (social heritage) to preserve local cultures so that future generations can continue to recognise and carry out their own regional culture. We must preserve local wisdom, which mirrors our identity, by seeking truth values through science and research and encouraging people to develop a culture that respects human dignity as civilised human beings. Therefore, as parents, community leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders, government leaders and other community task holders, we must feel called to continue to explore the points of local wisdom by continuing to introduce and teach every noble value (kindness) to our children and young generation so that they can find themselves as autonomous and social beings in building relationships with themselves, others, the universe, and their God.

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