

Bridging Tradition and Religion: Traditional Recitation (*Pengajian Adat*) in Kerinci

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Abstract

This research focuses on the traditional recitations in Hiang Karya Village, known as the “three-village traditional recitation” (Hiang Karya, Hiang Tinggi, and Hiang Sakti). These recitations are typically studied by *ninik mamak* (traditional elders), *syarak* officials, village heads, and village staff from the three villages. The recitations are recognized as mixed traditional recitations, passed down through generations. Within this tradition, *ninik mamak*, *syarak* officials, village heads, village staff, and *datok* (former *ninik mamak*) learn the traditional and religious values embedded within them. Additionally, Hiang is home to a special recitation for women, known as the BKMT recitation (Badan Kontak Majelis Taklim). Hiang hosts a variety of recitations, not only those related to tradition within the traditional recitations but also those with profound religious significance. This study found that these recitations play a vital role in the lives of the Hiang community, both in preserving traditional customs and in strengthening Islamic values that serve as their guiding principles.

Keywords: *Traditional Recitations; Kerinci Culture; Hiang Village*



Introduction

Hiang Karya Village is a result of the division of Hiang Tinggi Village. In the past, only Hiang Tinggi Village was known, but over time, changes occurred. In 2001, the village was divided, resulting in the formation of Hiang Karya Village. Later, in 2011, further division led to the creation of Hiang Tinggi Village, Hiang Karya Village, and Hiang Sakti Village, making the area once called Hiang Tinggi Village now consist of three separate villages.

Tanah Hiang, or in the Kerinci language also referred to as *Riang*, meaning settlement, is inhabited by the indigenous Kerinci people located on the northeastern side of Lake Kerinci, precisely at the foot of the hills stretching to the east of Lake Kerinci. This traditional area is traversed by a tributary called the Batang Sangkir River or Air Hiang (Ramadani, 2022). The Batang Sangkir River flows from the southeast to the northwest of the Kerinci Valley and empties into the Batang Merao River.

The flow direction of the Batang Sangkir River is opposite to that of the Batang Merao River, which flows from the northwest to the southeast. Therefore, in the proverbs of the Kerinci people, the Batang Sangkir River is often referred to as “Air Riang Pulang Berbalik” (the water returning backward). Tanah Hiang also features a small hill situated in the middle of the residential plain, which appears to be separated from the larger hills on the eastern side.

Indonesia is known for its diversity and is a unitary state encompassing various elements such as culture, regions, ethnicities, races, beliefs, and more (Nur, 2001). Fundamentally, humans are endowed with instincts to recognize signs in social life, either directly or indirectly. These signs function as regulators of daily behavior or attitudes that originate from within humans themselves. However, people are not always aware that their daily behaviors are structured within a specific pattern. For this reason, humans have been immersed in such patterns since birth, shaped through processes of imitation or education they receive (Husen, 2010; Dijk, 2006). On the other hand, from birth, humans are destined to live alongside others, resulting in ongoing and evolving social interactions.

Method

This study was conducted in Hiang Karya Village, my own place of residence, known for its rich cultural heritage. The research focuses on the customs and traditions practiced in the village, particularly involving one of its traditional leaders. The qualitative research method was employed, allowing direct engagement and in-depth exploration of the topic. Data collection techniques included interviews, observations, and document analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The research took place on December 2023, at the residence of a traditional leader in Hiang Karya Village. This specific location and time were chosen to facilitate direct interaction and detailed data collection in the natural setting of the community's cultural practices.

Discussion

Adat refers to a broad and rich cultural notion encompassing norms, cultural values, customs, and customary laws that have been developed and practiced within a specific area over generations (Taufik, 1966). This concept holds significant importance in shaping the social fabric and identity of a community, as it provides the foundational guidelines for behavior and interaction within society. Meanwhile, recitation refers to a variety of activities designed to teach, propagate, or invite individuals to learn about religious teachings, particularly those of Islam. This activity can take many forms, including preaching, sermons, or group study sessions.

In Kerinci, a region deeply rooted in its cultural and religious heritage, the practice of recitation is not a novel phenomenon. For generations, people in Kerinci have actively participated in religious education, particularly through customary studies that intertwine Islamic teachings with local traditions (Arzam, 2016). The prominence of such studies is not confined to Kerinci alone. Outside the region, similar programs focused on studying Islam and its relationship with local customs are thriving, demonstrating the enduring significance of integrating cultural traditions with religious teachings.

Indonesia, as a nation characterized by its rich diversity, exhibits a close relationship between cultural practices and its natural environment. This diversity is reflected in the various activities undertaken by communities to support their livelihoods, ensure social cohesion, and foster spiritual growth. Among these, recitation serves as a cornerstone for religious education and community bonding, linking spiritual pursuits with cultural continuity (Suyuti, 2008; Haryanto, 2012).

The Unique Nature of Adat Recitations in Kerinci

Customary recitations in Kerinci, often referred to as “adat recitations,” embody the fusion of traditional cultural practices and Islamic teachings (Aprilia et al., 2023). These gatherings focus on two primary areas of study: adat issues (customary matters) and *syarak* issues (sharia matters). These sessions are typically led by local leaders or instructors well-versed in both Islamic jurisprudence and customary laws. The term adat recitation is used because its participants are predominantly community elders, indigenous leaders, and other figures of authority, such as village heads or *ninik mamak* (customary elders).

The content of these adat recitations revolves around the principles and values embedded in adat and *syarak*. Participants study topics ranging from the preservation of local customs to the application of Islamic laws in their daily lives (Khadziq, 2009). Despite the distinct label of adat recitations, the underlying goal remains consistent across all groups: to enhance understanding of religious and cultural teachings.

Kerinci’s recitation programs also include gender-specific groups and youth-oriented recitations. For instance, in Hiang Karya Village, women’s recitations are organized under the banners of BKMT (Badan Kontak Majelis Taklim) or PERMATA, while men’s groups often identify as Majelis Taklim or similar organizations. The women's groups focus on diverse topics, such as the science of tasawuf (spirituality), tawhid (theology), and other Islamic sciences like tasrip (syntax) and the study of the 20 characteristics of Allah.

The men’s groups, on the other hand, emphasize similar religious studies but often engage in additional discussions related to community leadership and social

responsibilities. These gender-specific recitations take place weekly, with women's recitations typically scheduled on Monday evenings and men's on Friday evenings. The sessions are held at different homes on a rotational basis, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility.

Youth-oriented recitations also play a crucial role in fostering spiritual growth and community engagement among younger generations. In Hiang Karya, groups of young men and women gather for recitations on Sunday nights. These sessions incorporate a mix of activities, including cultural performances, prayers, and the recitation of Qur'anic verses, providing a holistic approach to religious education. Similar programs are also conducted in Hiang Tinggi and Hiang Sakti villages, where young participants come together under the HTKS (Hiang Karya, Hiang Tinggi, and Hiang Sakti) initiative. The HTKS recitations are held every two weeks, creating a platform for mixed-gender learning and interaction while maintaining the community's cultural values.

The Role of Ninik Mamak and Adat Structures

Central to the adat recitations are the ninik mamak, respected elders who serve as the custodians of Kerinci's customary practices and play a pivotal role in shaping the community's outlook on life (Yusuf, 2021). These individuals not only represent the interests of indigenous people but also collaborate with village authorities to drive local development initiatives. The synergy between adat leaders and the formal governance structure exemplifies the integration of traditional wisdom with modern administrative practices.

The adat recitations conducted in Hiang Karya, Hiang Tinggi, and Hiang Sakti differ from other community recitations due to their unique focus on topics like the 20 characteristics of Allah. This element, for instance, distinguishes them from the recitations held in neighboring villages, such as Betung Kuning, where the curriculum may not include such detailed theological discussions.

In addition to religious education, adat recitations serve as a platform for reinforcing community adherence to customary laws and regulations (Agus, 2006).

These sessions encourage participants to respect and uphold local traditions while aligning their actions with Islamic teachings. The result is a harmonious blend of cultural identity and religious commitment that strengthens the community's social fabric.

Majelis Taklim recitations, as a subset of religious study groups, hold a unique position within the broader framework of Islamic education in Kerinci (Zufriani, 2022). These recitations are structured, organized gatherings aimed at imparting Islamic teachings systematically. Their objectives extend beyond mere knowledge transfer; they seek to deepen participants' understanding, appreciation, and application of Islamic principles in daily life. Typically, Majelis Taklim sessions incorporate various teaching methods, such as lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and practical simulations. The flexible nature of these gatherings allows them to cater to diverse audiences, regardless of gender, age, or social status. They also transcend spatial limitations, being held in homes, mosques, or community centers as needed.

Social and Developmental Impact of Recitations

Beyond their spiritual and educational functions, recitations in Kerinci serve as vehicles for social development. By fostering a shared sense of purpose and identity, these gatherings contribute to community cohesion and resilience. They also provide opportunities for participants to develop leadership skills, moral character, and a sense of civic responsibility. For example, young men and women involved in HTKS recitations gain exposure to collective decision-making and teamwork, skills that are vital for future community leadership roles. Similarly, the adat recitations equip ninik mamak and other leaders with the knowledge and tools needed to address contemporary challenges while preserving cultural heritage.

Moreover, recitation activities can act as mediators for broader developmental goals. By instilling strong ethical and moral values, these sessions prepare individuals to become active and responsible participants in the community's development. This dual role—spiritual enrichment and social empowerment—underscores the significance of recitations as a cornerstone of Kerinci's cultural and religious life.

Conclusion

The integration of adat and religious teachings through various forms of recitations in Kerinci exemplifies a harmonious blending of tradition and spirituality. From the adat recitations led by ninik mamak to the youth-oriented HTKS programs, these activities serve as vital platforms for preserving cultural heritage, fostering religious understanding, and promoting community development. By engaging individuals across generations and social strata, Kerinci's recitation programs ensure that the values of adat and Islam remain relevant and impactful in shaping the community's future.

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