

Exploring the Cultural Customs of Mandi Belimau: Insights from Young People and Parents in 4 Belui Villages

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Abstract

The Belimau bath is a significant cultural custom observed among the Malay community, specifically in the four Belui villages, which will be discussed in detail. This traditional practice has been passed down through generations, dating back to ancient times and the era of our ancestors. Typically performed during the month of Safar, the Belimau bath serves as a means of washing and purifying heirlooms found in the four Belui villages. The bath involves mixing regular water or bathing water with the juice of kaffir lime, key orange, and other ingredients. According to the village elders, the Belimau bath holds symbolic significance as it is believed to reject negative influences, promote self-purification, and foster mental well-being. On the other hand, the youth in the four Belui villages perceive the Belimau bath as a means to honor and uphold the cultural customs of their ancestors. Despite the passage of time, the young generation in these villages continues to practice the Belimau bath, not only to pay homage to their ancient traditions but also to experience its refreshing effects on the body.

Keywords: *Belimau bath, cultural customs, Malay community, ancestral traditions*

Introduction

According to Davison (1991), culture encompasses both tangible and intangible aspects. Physical culture refers to the visible and material expressions of a society's customs, while non-physical culture encompasses the intangible aspects such as values and spirituality that hold significance for the local community. On the other hand, as noted by Koentjaraningrat (1980), culture represents a set of ideas that individuals possess and continuously develop through study. It can be regarded as an inherited tradition that requires learning and cultivation within a community, ensuring its transmission to future generations.

According to the First Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia (RI), Moh Hatta, culture represents a dynamic and ongoing creation of a nation. This perspective is highlighted in the book "History & Culture of Islam Classical Period (VII-XII Centuries AD)" by Faisal Ismail, where it is mentioned that Moh Hatta, who was recognized as a Muslim scholar, considered

religion to be an integral component of culture. The inclusion of religion within the concept of culture is attributed to the belief that religious influences play a significant role in shaping cultural preferences. It is this recognition of the religious impact that led Moh Hatta, as the father of the proclamation of independence, to include religion as an inseparable part of the nation's cultural fabric.

This opinion was expressed by Hatta during the First Cultural Congress in 1948 in Magelang. Here is an excerpt from Hatta's speech:

"Culture is a product of a nation's biology. There exist various types of culture. The question arises whether belief is a human creation or not. For me, both are not problematic. Belief is also a form of culture because through religion, individuals are able to lead their lives based on their preferences. Therefore, I assert that religion is a constituent element of culture..."

There are also individuals who argue that the essence of culture lies in the pattern of life that emerges and evolves within a community, serving to provide individuals with a shared understanding of their obligations and to govern human conduct in social interactions. Etymologically, the term "culture" originates from Sanskrit, specifically from the word "Buddhaya," which is the plural form of "Buddhi." In Sanskrit, "Buddhi" encompasses all aspects associated with the human mind and rationality.

In this case, culture is closely associated with language usage, communication methods, regional norms, and customs. According to Heritage (1985), culture can be categorized into three main elements:

First, Monuments: These are significant structures or objects that hold historical, artistic, or cultural value. *Second*, Building groups: This refers to collections of buildings or architectural ensembles that exhibit cultural significance within a specific context. *Third*, Sites: These locations or areas hold cultural importance, often encompassing historical, archaeological, or natural attributes.

Heritage (1985) provides a classification framework that aids in understanding and interpreting culture, by considering these three fundamental components.

Monuments are human creations that take various forms such as paintings, architecture, caves, sculptures, and other tangible works. Building groups consist of individual or interconnected structures with distinctive architectural features. Sites encompass human-made structures in harmony with the surrounding natural environment. As an Indonesian nation, it is our duty to safeguard and preserve our cultural heritage, embracing both the local culture within our regions and the broader cultural diversity found throughout Indonesia. The responsibility of

preserving culture lies with Indonesian citizens and those residing within Indonesia itself (Hadiwinoto, 2002).

As we are aware, the practice of the youth bath is an integral part of the Kerinci cultural customs, which continues to be upheld by certain individuals to this day. In this study, researchers aim to investigate the perceptions of both young people and parents from four villages regarding the youth bath ritual. The objective is to determine whether their viewpoints align with those of the older generation within the community.

Method

In this study, researchers employed qualitative research methods and utilized a phenomenological research approach. The researchers sought out subjects or informants who possessed an understanding of the youth bath ritual or its related aspects. The focus was on exploring and capturing the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants in relation to the bathing practice.

In this study, the researcher employed the technique of conducting interviews with the informants. The process of finding informants involved initially assessing their understanding of the youth bath ritual. Furthermore, meticulous preparation was undertaken by the researchers, which included developing a set of questions to be asked to the sources or informants in relation to the specific research topic under investigation.

In this study, qualitative research was conducted, focusing on phenomena and experiences of individuals. The chosen approach was phenomenological, which involved conducting interviews with multiple individuals who were knowledgeable or had personal experience related to the research topic, specifically "Mandi Belimau di 4 Desa Belui" (Belimau Bath in the four Belui villages). The interviews aimed to explore and understand how each individual subjectively perceived their experiences of this bathing phenomenon. The researcher successfully interviewed parents, young men, and women from the four Belui villages, who shared their knowledge and experiences regarding the belimau bath ritual. The results of these interviews indicated that all the participants had engaged in the belimau bath practice.

Result and Discussion

One example of cultural practice in the four Belui villages is the tradition of "balimau" or bathing with lime juice. Balimau is a traditional bathing ritual that has evolved among the Minangkabau people and is commonly performed in specific locations with river currents and

bathing areas. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation and is believed to have persisted for centuries.

The balimau tradition in the four Belui villages is rooted in the belief that it serves a dual purpose: cleansing oneself both physically and mentally before the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan. This practice aligns with the teachings of Islam, emphasizing the importance of purifying oneself before undertaking the act of fasting. From a physical standpoint, the ritual involves taking a thorough and cleansing bath.

In ancient times, not everyone had access to clean bathing facilities due to various factors such as the unavailability of soap, water scarcity in certain areas, or individuals being occupied with work or other responsibilities. As a substitute for soap, lime (calcium hydroxide) was used in some regions because of its properties that help dissolve oils and sweat from the body. This practice of using lime for bathing was prevalent in certain areas.

The Belimau bath is performed annually during the month of Safar, and it is believed to serve as a protection against negative influences in the village. This bathing tradition is deeply rooted in the customs and practices passed down by our ancestors, and it holds specific purposes within it. However, as society has progressed over time, the religious significance and effectiveness of the Belimau bath have diminished due to various factors influenced by modern developments (Pebrianto, 2009).

As previously explained, culture is a concept created by humans and can be developed by humans themselves. The Yogyakarta Cultural Value Preservation Center has a vision to preserve, protect, develop, and utilize the cultural values of the nation. This includes the preservation of spiritual cultural values that derive from the noble heritage of the nation's culture. It is crucial to promote awareness and socialize these values to the broader community, particularly the younger generation, as they will play a vital role as the future successors of the nation. By instilling these cultural values in the younger generation, there is an opportunity to ensure the continuity and preservation of the nation's cultural heritage.

Whether we are aware of it or not, the teachings of belief in God Almighty contain noble values that have the potential to strengthen the identity and character of a nation. These values serve as guidance and references for young people in their search for identity and the formation of their own character. It is important for them to have examples and sources of noble values, which can be found in the teachings of our predecessors. As the era progresses, the Belimau bath ritual can be further developed to incorporate additional positive values.

However, it is important to note that there have been changes in the way the Belimau bath is currently practiced. Unlike in the past, where the bathing ritual was conducted separately

for men and women, it is now performed in flowing water with both genders present. This represents a significant departure from the traditional practices of our ancestors.

It is essential to consider how these modifications may impact the preservation and transmission of the original values associated with the Belimau bath. Adapting the ritual to contemporary circumstances should be done with care to ensure that the positive values and cultural significance are retained while addressing the evolving needs and dynamics of the community. Although in such a way, there is a plus that the people who live in the four villages of Belui do not leave their own cultural customs. According to the old people in this village they think that this belimau bath is a form of traditional effort or tradition that exists here, they believe that this belimau bath is to cleanse or purify themselves both outwardly and mentally, to resist, and they also believe that this belimau bath is for treatment that is in themselves and treatment for people who are sick in the village.

The Belimau bath has been practiced since ancient times, and the older generation in the village holds their own beliefs and perceptions regarding its significance. According to them, the Belimau bath serves various purposes such as purification of the body and mind, protection against negative influences, and even cleansing heirloom objects that are kept in traditional houses within the four Belui villages. The ritual of washing these objects is typically performed in preparation for the SKO kenduri, a ceremonial event held every five years.

Arzam (2006) also states that the Belimau bath is traditionally carried out during the month of Safar. Presently, it is considered a requirement before the SKO kenduri takes place, as it is believed to facilitate self-purification. The belief in the effectiveness of the Belimau bath varies among individuals, with some choosing to embrace its significance while others may hold different views. Nonetheless, this longstanding custom has been passed down through generations, and our ancestors firmly believed in its power to ward off negative influences.

Before engaging in the Belimau bath, individuals express their intentions for positive outcomes not only for themselves but also for their families and the entire community. They offer prayers for favorable circumstances as one of the functions of this bathing ritual is to reject negative reinforcements. As Indonesian citizens, we recognize the unique cultural characteristics present in each region. Therefore, as the successors of this cultural heritage, it is our responsibility to preserve and uphold these traditional customs in the four Belui villages (Galla, 2000).

It is essential for us to continue the cultural customs passed down by our ancestors, as long as they remain in a positive context. We understand that the belief in the Belimau bath as a means to reject reinforcements is rooted in the belief that all forms of rejection, treatment, and

self-purification ultimately come from Allah SWT. Therefore, preserving this cultural custom of bathing Belimau is a way to show appreciation for our cultural heritage. Disregarding or failing to understand the cultural context may lead to a disregard for the customs within our own region.

Indonesia is a diverse country with various races, tribes, cultures, and languages. Learning about our own culture can provide us with new knowledge and serve as motivation for future generations. Developing and preserving our cultural customs, including the practice of Belimau bathing, can contribute to the richness of our cultural heritage (Karmadi, 2007). Hence, it is important to prioritize the preservation of our own culture.

Furthermore, the perspective of the young people in the four Belui villages echoes the belief that Belimau bathing has been practiced since the time of their ancestors and is considered a common cultural tradition in their communities. They acknowledge that one of the functions of this ritual is self-purification. However, they also argue that self-purification in Islam is achieved through repentance to the Creator, Allah SWT. While there may be differences in beliefs between the older and younger generations, the young individuals still hold deep respect for their parents' beliefs regarding the function of Belimau bathing. They observe that their elders perform the ritual within the context of Islam, often reciting the basmalah before the bath. This suggests that despite their belief in the ritual's self-purification aspect, they maintain their belief in Allah Almighty.

The youth also note that the Quran does not directly mention Belimau bathing as a means of self-purification or rejecting reinforcements. However, they recognize the positive value in the intentions of the older generation before performing the Belimau bath. They intend for good things, not only for themselves and their families but also for the community and region they reside in. Given the diverse ethnicities, cultures, races, religions, and customs in Indonesia, as long as no harm is caused, engaging in Belimau bathing is seen as a legitimate practice.

Overall, it is important to preserve and respect cultural customs while considering the diverse beliefs and contexts within our society.

Indeed, the point of not harming anyone in the context of cultural customs refers to refraining from disturbing or insulting others and avoiding negative actions. The young men and women in the community raise a question about why Belimau bathing is still practiced to this day. They propose that it is a form of community appreciation for their ancestors and a way of valuing their own cultural customs. They take pride in the unique characteristics of their region and see Belimau bathing as a means of self-purification.

In the specific context of the four Belui villages, the Belimau bath holds its own distinct features. It is not only seen as a means of personal purification but also serves as a way to cleanse and decorate ancestral heirlooms, such as Kris swords found in these villages. Each family in the four Belui villages has its own designated house called the "heart house" where these heirloom objects, including the Kris swords, are kept. These swords are not ordinary store-bought items but rather cherished relics handed down from ancestors. They undergo the Belimau bathing ritual using lime water to maintain their significance.

The young men and women in these villages have a deep appreciation for their unique cultural customs, such as the Belimau bath. They view it as a manifestation of their love for Indonesia and their own region. It is evident that there is a strong sense of cultural pride and unity among the youth regarding their customs, including the Belimau bath practiced in their respective villages.

If young people do not want to care about the customs that exist in their own area, they may be left behind in history or detached from their own characteristics. As young people in Indonesia, we have an obligation to develop our own cultural customs. One example, especially for those in these four Belui villages, is that we must appreciate and even develop the cultural customs in our area. This is because the culture or cultural customs here play several very important roles in the advancement of community thinking. These roles are as follows:

Guidelines between humans and groups; a place to generate ideas; a life guide; a differentiator between humans and animals; regulators to help humans distinguish between what is good and what is bad; instructions on how humans should act; and the basic capital of development (Monto Bauto, 2004).

From the roles mentioned above, we can conclude that it is important to preserve the culture and customs of our own area. One example of this is the Balimau Bath tradition in the four villages of Belui. A young man and woman from these villages expressed that they follow this tradition as a way of respecting their ancestors and their customs. They believe that the Balimau Bath can also leave a pleasant scent on their bodies. The bath is made from orange juice and fragrant flowers such as white flowers and roses. This combination of ingredients gives the bath a fragrant quality, and washing from head to toe ensures that the entire body smells pleasant.

As young people living in these four villages, it is our responsibility to appreciate, value, and develop our cultural customs that have been passed down from our ancestors. By doing so, we can ensure that we do not lose touch with our history and continue to preserve our culture. We must continue to explore the customs of the Balimau Bath so that future generations do not

forget or lose knowledge of this tradition. Therefore, it is our duty to preserve and develop the Balimau Bath.

However, we, as young men and women from the four Belui villages, must understand that the Balimau Bath, while serving the purpose of purification, is not a religious obligation. Our true faith should only be directed towards Allah SWT, as we are only required to believe in the six pillars of Imam. If we believe that the act of self-purification through the Balimau Bath goes against our true faith, we would be displeasing God. Rejecting reinforcements and treatments should not lead us to grieve God, as these actions are natural aspects of Allah SWT.

The Balimau Bathing tradition symbolizes the purification of oneself, both outwardly and mentally, to eliminate bad behavior, especially as we enter the holy month of Ramadan. This tradition is observed during traditional Kerinci feasts, Kenduri Sko (the ceremony to honor the leader), and thanksgiving, which occur once every five years. The tradition carries ethical values and reflects the wise perspective of life within the Kerinci community. Mandi Belimau, as a local wisdom, plays a significant role in guiding the clean and harmonious lives of the Kerinci people, helping them overcome negative tendencies and promoting lasting peace.

The Balimau Bathing tradition, alongside the Kenduri Sko tradition and the gratitude of the people from the four Belui villages, also serves as a means of socializing the younger generation. It prevents them from being consumed by new values that may not align with the nation's identity. While we should embrace the convenience and closeness enabled by rapid communication technology, we must still preserve traditional values that emphasize purity of heart, brotherhood, and mutual respect. The Balimau Bath, Kenduri Sko, and Community Celebrations are mediums for maintaining these values in Kerinci.

Balimau Bathing is a ritual of self-purification of the body and mind, aimed at eliminating various forms of bad behavior, and it is traditionally conducted before the holy month of Ramadan. The noble values associated with the Balimau Bath are closely tied to Islamic values, particularly during the month of Ramadan, which serves as a time for self-cleansing from negative behaviors. The tradition of Balimau Bathing, Kenduri Sko, and Syukuran Rakyat Kerinci acts as a protective measure and antidote against the erosion of cultural cohesion within the community. Therefore, it is essential to maintain the original practice of the Balimau Bath and avoid turning it into a mere spectacle lacking the essence of community life. Upholding the procedural values requires perseverance and continuous effort, allowing the younger generation to grasp the meaning of cultural practices and understand the wisdom of the past in the context of today's evolving society.

The social hierarchy among residents should not create difficulties for one another but instead bring mutual benefits. The implementation of local traditions and customs serves not only to attract tourists to visit Kerinci but also plays a crucial role in shaping the character of the people, particularly the younger generation, to protect them from the potential negative influences of global culture that could disrupt their mentality and character.

Conclusion

Culture exists in both physical and non-physical forms. Physical culture refers to tangible and observable aspects, while non-physical culture encompasses values and spiritual elements that are beneficial to the local community. According to Koentjaraningrat (1980), culture is an idea that individuals possess and continuously develop through study. It can be considered as an inherited tradition that is learned and passed down through generations. Culture is the result of human ideas, capable of being developed and transmitted across time. It plays several important roles in human life, such as providing guidance to differentiate between good and bad. Therefore, it is crucial to study, develop, and appreciate cultural customs, as neglecting them would be detrimental to both individual and societal well-being.

Moving on to the cultural customs in the four Belui villages, one notable example is the Balimau Bath. There is a stark difference in perspectives between the older and younger generations in these villages. The older generation views the Belimau Bath as a form of rejecting reinforcements and self-purification, while the younger generation follows the tradition without necessarily believing in its function. Despite these differing perceptions, it can be concluded that the Belimau Bath is a way of showing gratitude and respect to their ancestors. The younger generation appreciates the opportunity to learn and carry on their cultural customs. It is worth noting that the Belimau Bath is a characteristic of Malay society, but my research focuses specifically on the four Belui villages due to their relevance to the research topic.

Researcher differs from previous studies in that it explores the Balimau Bath's practice during the month of Safar, rather than solely during Lebaran or fasting. Additionally, my research highlights that the Belimau Bath serves not only as a form of self-purification but also as a means to ward off diseases and as a treatment. Furthermore, the research explains that the Belimau Bath is used to cleanse the ancestral heirlooms in the village. While parents may assert the credibility of their perception, they do not impose their beliefs on the youth and women in the village. In Indonesia, everyone is entitled to their own opinions. However, the intelligent young individuals in the community do not criticize the perspectives of the older generation regarding the Belimau Bath. They respect the tradition that has been passed down through the

ages and appreciate their cultural customs. They perform the Belimau Bath with positive intentions, believing that everything comes from Allah SWT, and they think positively and clearly about the blessings bestowed upon them.

The Belimau Bath is seen as an expression of gratitude towards the older generation for preserving their cultural heritage. Although differing opinions exist regarding the beliefs associated with the Belimau Bath, the young individuals acknowledge the positive aspects and the scented quality it provides. The use of orange juice and fragrant flowers is a well-known practice in the Belimau Bath, traditionally performed in flowing river water. However, due to the rapid development of society, more people now conduct the Belimau Bath in their private bathrooms, mixing orange juice and fragrant flowers in buckets. Nevertheless, they still respect and maintain their cultural customs. As Indonesian citizens, it is our obligation to develop, learn, and appreciate our own culture, including the Belimau Bath in the four Belui villages, so that future generations can also learn about the cultural customs in their respective villages.

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