

## THE TINGKEBAN TRADITION AND ISLAM-JAWA ACCULTURATION AMONG THE JAVANESE COMMUNITY IN NORTH SUMATRA

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### ABSTRACT

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*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi tradisi Tingkeban, yang telah mengalami akulturasi dengan nilai-nilai keagamaan sebagai bentuk adaptasi budaya di kalangan masyarakat Jawa di Sumatera Utara. Fokus utamanya adalah bagaimana makna simbolis tradisi ini dipahami oleh masyarakat Jawa dalam lingkungan sosial tempat mereka tinggal. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologis untuk menyelidiki secara mendalam praktik Tingkeban di Desa Pangkalan Lunang, Labuhanbatu Utara. Data primer diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan anggota masyarakat Jawa, pemimpin agama, dan pinisepuh (sesepuh adat). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa migran Jawa terus melestarikan tradisi Tingkeban sebagai warisan budaya, meskipun praktik dan maknanya telah bergeser dari tempat asalnya, bahkan ketika unsur-unsur ritual fisiknya masih menyerupai bentuk aslinya. Tingkeban dimaksudkan sebagai permohonan untuk keselamatan wanita yang sedang hamil tujuh bulan agar ibu dan anak mendapatkan kesehatan dan perlindungan. Setiap tahapan ritual disertai dengan doa, shalawat, dan dzikir, sehingga mengintegrasikan ritual adat dengan prinsip-prinsip Islam.*

*This study aims to explore the Tingkeban tradition, which has undergone acculturation with religious values as a form of cultural adaptation among the Javanese community in North Sumatra. Its primary focus is on how the symbolic meanings of this tradition are perceived by Javanese people within the social environment in which they live. This research employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to investigate in depth the practice of Tingkeban in Pangkalan Lunang Village, North Labuhanbatu. Primary data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation involving Javanese community members, religious leaders, and pinisepuh (customary elders). The findings show that Javanese migrants continue to preserve the Tingkeban tradition as an inherited cultural legacy, although its practice and meaning have shifted from those in the place of origin, even while its physical ritual elements still resemble the original form. Tingkeban is intended as a supplication for the safety of women who are seven months pregnant so that both mother and child may be granted health and protection. Each stage of the ritual is accompanied by prayers, shalawat, and dhikr, thereby integrating customary rites with Islamic principles.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Readings of society in ethnic terms are often trapped in a rigid dichotomy that sharply separates ethnic identity from religious orientation.<sup>1</sup> This occurs because classical categories tend to position local tradition and Islam as two opposing poles that negate one another, even though sociological reality reveals a far more organic relationship.<sup>2</sup> In everyday life, religion does not appear as an alien entity; rather, it grows through symbolic language, social conduct, and practices integrated with ancestral culture. Instead of viewing Javanese society as a static entity merely preserving custom, it should be understood as a community that continually negotiates its beliefs through dynamic processes of adapting meaning. Therefore, understanding Javanese identity requires serious attention to the points of encounter and cultural interpretation that unfold in their lived practices.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, tradition is not merely a frozen inheritance from the past, but a living culture continually reproduced by its bearers.<sup>4</sup> The continuity of a tradition is not determined by the repetition of an identical form, but by its capacity to accommodate new meanings in response to changing social spaces and the outlooks of contemporary generations. Each generation selects and adjusts ancestral values so that they remain relevant to its needs and to the challenges of the time. Without such reinterpretation, tradition would lose its vitality and become nothing more than a historical artifact estranged from its community. Thus, studying tradition means reading the strategies through which a community maintains the continuity of its identity amid ongoing change.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of Javanese communities in Sumatra has crystallized into a group known as Pujakesuma (Putera Jawa Kelahiran Sumatera, or Sumatra-born Javanese). The identity of Pujakesuma is built not only upon the historical foundations of colonial migration and transmigration as contract laborers beginning in 1875 in Tanah Deli (now North Sumatra), but also upon the continued maintenance of life-cycle rituals such as *Tingkeban*, which functions as a space

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<sup>1</sup> Surya Hadi Darma et al., "Relationship of Religion and Culture," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 9, no. 1 (December 5, 2021): 149–62, <https://doi.org/10.15575/ijni.v9i1.12233>.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Alifuddin and Abdul Muiz Amir, "Segregation of Religious Identity: An Ethnography of Religion Pluralism and Cultural Trauma in the Tolaki Communities," *Al-Qalam* 28, no. 2 (November 2, 2022): 169, <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v28i2.1090>.

<sup>3</sup> Rubaidi Rubaidi, "Java Islam: Relationship of Javanese Culture and Islamic Mysticism in the Post-Colonial Study Perspective," *El Harakah Jurnal Budaya Islam* 21, no. 1 (June 12, 2019): 19, <https://doi.org/10.18860/el.v21i1.6066>.

<sup>4</sup> Aqmarina Bella Agustin, "Javanese Muslim Local Culture and Tradition in Islamic Perspective," *Sunan Kalijaga International Journal on Islamic Educational Research* 3, no. 1 (2019): 15–24, <https://doi.org/10.14421/skijier.2019.2019.31.02>.

<sup>5</sup> Heru Syahputra, Hasyimsyah Nasution, and Amroeni Drajat, "The Living Philosophy of Tumpeng: Preserving Javanese Cultural Identity in the Modern Era," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 14, no. 03 (2025): 716–29, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v14i03.8957>.

for cultural negotiation in the land of migration.<sup>6</sup> The *Tingkeban* tradition continues to preserve symbolic rites intended to ensure the safety of mother and fetus, although its expression has shifted toward a more open and religious form. This phenomenon resonates with sociological studies of the Javanese diaspora, which show that despite adjustments in dialect and patterns of social interaction, symbols, rituals, arts, and language are still maintained as “anchors of identity” so that individuals do not lose their cultural roots.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the *Tingkeban* tradition also becomes a space for expressing Javanese identity as a way of preserving, transmitting, and displaying ethnic identity on the island of Sumatra.

Research on the *Tingkeban* tradition by Purwaningrum and Ismail suggests that the ceremony is a product of acculturation between Islam and Javanese culture, manifested through cultural elements and ritual symbolism.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Austiyana shows that in the Kalisari community of Bojonegoro, *Tingkeban* is perceived as a pregnancy ritual that endures because of sociocultural factors, reverence for ancestral heritage, and localized traditional practices.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Jannah and Rivauzi emphasize the presence of Islamic educational values within the *Tingkeban* tradition in West Pasaman, shifting the focus toward religious-educational aspects rather than the dynamics of acculturation.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Wahyuni, Marafat, and Nggawu highlight that Javanese ethnic processions in Konawe incorporate artistic, symbolic, social, and aesthetic dimensions.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Wajdi, Washudin, and Marliana argue that *Tingkeban* in Nganjuk represents a harmonious integration of local wisdom and Islamic values that preserves the local community’s Javanese-Islamic identity.<sup>12</sup> Only limited research has examined the *Tingkeban* tradition as an arena of Islam–Javanese acculturation among the Javanese diaspora in North Sumatra, since previous studies have predominantly focused on the island of Java.

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<sup>6</sup> Radhi Abimanyu Yudhawirawan, Deddy Mulyana, and Sri Seti Indriani, “Komunikasi Antarbudaya Dan Transformasi Etnik Anggota Pujakesuma Di Medan, Sumatera Utara,” *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 18, no. 6 (December 22, 2024): 4610, <https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v18i6.4208>.

<sup>7</sup> Elvian Mutiara et al., “Values of Java Culture,” *FORUM PAEDAGOGIK* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 2023): 294–306, <https://doi.org/10.24952/paedagogik.v13i2.3922>.

<sup>8</sup> Septiana Purwaningrum and Habib Ismail, “Akulturasi Islam dengan Budaya Jawa: Studi Folkloris Tradisi Telonan dan Tingkeban di Kediri Jawa Timur,” *Fikri : Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya* 4, no. 1 (June 14, 2019): 31–42, <https://doi.org/10.25217/jf.v4i1.476>.

<sup>9</sup> Mimin Austiyana, “Tingkeban: Javanese Ritual During Pregnancy in Kalisari, Bojonegoro, East Java,” *Muqoddima Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Riset Sosiologi* 2, no. 2 (2021): 159–76, <https://doi.org/10.47776/mjprs.002.02.05>.

<sup>10</sup> Miftahul Jannah and Ahmad Rivauzi, “Tradisi Tingkeban Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam Di Nagari Persiapan Limau Puruik Kecamatan Kinali,” *ISLAMIKA* 4, no. 4 (October 1, 2022): 541–57, <https://doi.org/10.36088/islamika.v4i4.2058>.

<sup>11</sup> Dwi Wahyuni, La Ode Sidu Marafat, and La Ode Nggawu, “Kajian Seni dalam Proses Upacara Tingkeban Etnik Jawa di Kelurahan Sendang Mulya Sari Kecamatan Tongauna Kabupaten Konawe,” *Jurnal Pembelajaran Seni & Budaya* 6, no. 2 (December 30, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.33772/jpsb.v6i2.12521>.

<sup>12</sup> Muh Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, Washudin Washudin, and Yuli Marliana, “Resonating Culture and Religion: A Comprehensive Examination of The Tingkeban Ceremony in Nganjuk,” *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 1 (2024): 37–50, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v24i1.7330>.

This article proceeds from the argument that *Tingkeban* among the Javanese community in North Sumatra is a form of acculturation that actively revitalizes ancestral heritage through an Islamic reorientation. This process does not sever ties with the past; rather, it constitutes a synchronization in which custom and religion are placed in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Changes in the stages of the ritual indicate that the community is not merely preserving its outward form, but is internalizing Islamic values into the essence of Javanese tradition so that it remains aligned with their religious principles. This phenomenon demonstrates that cultural identity need not dissolve when it encounters a new environment; instead, it may transform into a resilient hybrid identity. From this perspective, the study affirms that *Tingkeban* is concrete evidence of the elasticity of Javanese heritage in responding to the religious consciousness of the community that sustains it.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretive ethnographic orientation to understand the *Tingkeban* tradition as a meaning-laden cultural practice in the lives of Javanese people in Pangkalan Lunang Village, Kualuh Leidong District, North Labuhanbatu Regency, North Sumatra. The study is directed toward capturing the community's perspective on each ritual stage, the shifts in meaning that accompany it, and the forms of Islam–Javanese acculturation that live within their everyday experience. The research subjects include customary leaders, religious leaders, families who organize *Tingkeban* ceremonies, and community members who know about or are directly involved in the implementation of the tradition. Research data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation focused on the implementation of *Tingkeban* and the involvement of participants in each stage of the ceremony. In-depth interviews were used to explore the informants' understanding of ritual meaning, social function, religious values, and changes in *Tingkeban* practices in the local community. Documentation was used to complement the field data in the form of notes, photographs, and written sources relevant to the object of study. All data were analyzed descriptively and interpretively through data reduction, organization of findings, interpretation of meaning, and drawing conclusions. Through these steps, the study seeks to interpret *Tingkeban* not only as a cultural heritage but also as a socio-religious practice that demonstrates the adaptation of Javanese tradition within an Islamic horizon among the Javanese community in North Sumatra.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The *Tingkeban* Tradition: The Cultural Heritage of the Javanese

The *Tingkeban* tradition is one of the customary ceremonies found in Javanese society, particularly in relation to pregnancy.<sup>13</sup> Etymologically, *Tingkeban* derives from the Javanese word *tingkeb*, meaning “complete” or “full,” referring to the completed stage of a mother’s pregnancy and indicating that the child in the womb is ready to be prepared for and welcomed at birth. The *Tingkeban* tradition is also understood as part of a cultural legacy that has been practiced by Javanese communities from generation to generation since the era of the Kediri Kingdom under King Prabu Widayaka, better known as Jayabaya. This narrative originates from the tragic story of Niken Satingkeb and her husband, Sadiya, who had to face the bitter reality that none of their nine children survived. In the midst of despair, they continued to nurture hope through prayers and various efforts so that, if they were blessed with another child, the baby would not suffer the same misfortune. After following various forms of advice without seeing signs of pregnancy, the couple finally decided to appear before the king to seek spiritual guidance for the profound grief they were experiencing.<sup>14</sup>

Moved by the heartbreaking story of his subjects, Prabu Widayaka gave instructions in the form of a series of ritual practices that had to be performed with steadfast devotion. The ritual began with the obligation to bathe in the afternoon every Saturday and Wednesday, using a coconut shell as a dipper while reciting special mantras as a supplication for safety. After this purification ritual, Niken Satingkeb was required to put on clean clothing and perform a procession of carrying a yellow coconut in her cloth before finally dropping it to the ground. As a complement to the ritual, the yellow coconut had previously been tied with a strip of *tebu tulak* leaf, which the husband then had to cut with a *keris* immediately after the coconut was dropped.<sup>15</sup>

The king’s command was then carried out solemnly by Sadiya and Niken Satingkeb upon their return home. Not long after observing these instructions, Niken Satingkeb became pregnant again and eventually gave birth safely. The success of this safe and healthy birth later became the origin of the institutionalization of the *Tingkeban* ceremony within Javanese society. This tradition, associated with the name of Niken Satingkeb, has continued to be maintained and transmitted across generations as a manifestation of the hope for the safety of mother and child.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Purwaningrum and Ismail, “Akulturasi Islam dengan Budaya Jawa: Studi Folkloris Tradisi Telonan dan Tingkeban di Kediri Jawa Timur.”

<sup>14</sup> M. Sholikhin, *Mistik Dan Makna Ritual Jawa: Bertahan Hidup Dengan Kekuatan Spiritual* (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Sholikhin, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Ali and Al Humaidy, “The Symbolic Interaction of Tandhe ’ in Sumenep Madurese,” *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 28, no. 1 (2020): 172–91, <https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v27i1.1584>.

The *Tingkeban* tradition is also known as *mitoni*, derived from the word *pitu*, which in Javanese means the number seven, referring to the seventh month of pregnancy when the ceremony is performed.<sup>17</sup> In the Javanese worldview, the number seven (*pitu*) signifies pitulungan, or help. Javanese people understand this “help” as an odd number believed to mark a transitional phase, safety, and completeness, making it an important moment for offering prayers in the hope of well-being in this world and the hereafter. Therefore, the seventh month of pregnancy is regarded as the appropriate stage for carrying out prayers and safety rituals for the mother and the fetus.<sup>18</sup>

*Tingkeban* itself constitutes a unity of spiritual and social elements in welcoming the child who is about to be born, especially because the seventh month of pregnancy is a stage close to childbirth. This ceremony is performed when the pregnancy reaches seven months and is usually carried out as an expression of gratitude to Allah through a *selamatan*, namely a ritual gathering that includes a series of prayers and *dhikr*. The *selamatan* ceremony practiced by Javanese communities reflects the process of human life and the birth of a child into the world, marking the important phases one must pass through in life by pursuing a good way of living. Both the *Tingkeban* and the *selamatan* are also intended to ensure the health and safety of the baby in the mother’s womb. Informants explained that *Tingkeban* is held in the hope that both the mother and her baby will always receive protection and ease during childbirth, and that the child will be born healthy and possess noble character and filial devotion toward both parents.<sup>19</sup>

In preparing to welcome a child expected to be born healthy, the *Tingkeban* tradition is also understood as involving the preparation of all necessary equipment and the determination of the appropriate time, although there has been a shift in values: in the past, the timing of childbirth was often entrusted to traditional birth attendants (*dukun beranak* or *paraji*). When the pregnancy reaches seven months, this period is viewed as the stage at which the baby becomes more active and the mother begins preparing herself for childbirth. Birth preparations also become an essential matter not to be neglected so that the child may be born safely. Usually, such preparations serve as an expression of joy in welcoming the birth of a child, especially a first child, whose arrival is often eagerly awaited in marriage.

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<sup>17</sup> Sholikhin, *Mistik Dan Makna Ritual Jawa: Bertahan Hidup Dengan Kekuatan Spiritual*.

<sup>18</sup> Alpi Ahyuni, Ida Hamidah, and Anik Khoridah, “The Slametan Tradition Of Seven Months Pregnancy (Mitoni) In Kedunggalar Ngawi,” *Jurnal Javanologi* 6, no. 2 (July 5, 2023): 1200–1211, <https://doi.org/10.20961/javanologi.v6i2.75121>.

<sup>19</sup> Ayu Septiana Putri, Abdul Khayu, and Try Heni Aprilia, “Nilai-Nilai Islam Dalam Tradisi Tingkeban Di Kelurahan Ngampel Kota Kediri,” *Al-Mabsut : Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Sosial* 18, no. 1 (July 18, 2024): 127–36, <https://doi.org/10.56997/almabsutjurnalstudiislamdansosial.v18i1.1534>.

### **The Practice of *Tingkeban* and Islam–Javanese Acculturation**

The implementation of the *Tingkeban* tradition is welcomed with happiness when a wife is blessed with her first child, as an expression of the anticipated joy of a married couple. The same is true for family members, neighbors, and friends who also await the first child. Although in its earlier form *Tingkeban* carried strong mystical overtones, including belief in spiritual powers associated with large trees through signs interpreted by a *pujonggo* a figure believed in Javanese society to possess elevated spiritual power and knowledge families and pregnant mothers trusted such pronouncements and were instructed to place food at large trees, stone statues, or other sacralized places with the belief that this would prevent disturbance to the pregnant woman.

Shifts in the practice of *Tingkeban* reveal a process of cultural acculturation: in the community of Pangkalan Lunang Village, North Labuhanbatu, the tradition is no longer practiced in accordance with older teachings. *Tingkeban* and its ceremonial processes are now conducted within the family home. The ceremony involves the nuclear family, the extended family, and the surrounding community, and it is usually led by customary and religious leaders. The sequence of *Tingkeban* processions has been transmitted from generation to generation within Javanese culture, although in practice it may be adjusted in accordance with social and economic conditions as well as developments in religious understanding in different social environments. Based on interviews with residents of Pangkalan Lunang Village, the *Tingkeban* tradition no longer includes practices considered to depart from Islamic teachings. Rather, the relationship between ritual practice and Islam is now maintained in a better way without eliminating the ritual itself.<sup>20</sup>

The prayers recited begin with tawassul, followed by shalawat, Qur'anic recitation, and dhikr, all of which function as a means of drawing human beings closer to Allah and expressing gratitude to Him for granting a child as a trust that must be nurtured through education and Islamic teaching. These prayers are offered as a means of seeking safety and smooth delivery for both the mother and the baby in the womb.

In practice, the *Tingkeban* tradition among the Javanese community in Pangkalan Lunang Village is a practice aligned with Islamic teachings, because in its earlier form the tradition could lead to acts considered shirk and thereby lose its Islamic essence. Nevertheless, customs passed down from generation to generation have become deeply embedded in Javanese family life. The ritual has shifted and now functions as a profound means of expressing gratitude for a pregnancy that has reached seven months. The local community performs it as a form of inward effort filled with hope, with the aim that the pregnant mother and the unborn child may receive the blessing of perfect health. Beyond that, safety throughout the process of childbirth remains a central prayer.

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<sup>20</sup> Kartim, "Interview Tokoh Agama" (Desa Pangkalan Lunang, 2026).

Such an understanding arises from the lived experience of their ancestors. To this day, the tradition continues to be maintained as a relevant and highly valued form of local wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

The *Tingkeban* tradition deserves to be preserved as a valuable procession, although there is no element of coercion in its implementation. This tradition is a ceremony performed specifically within Javanese cultural settings. The findings show that if the wife's family is ethnically Javanese, *Tingkeban* will be held at the request of the Javanese family even when the husband is Sumatra-born and belongs to the Malay ethnic group in North Labuhanbatu.<sup>22</sup> The implementation of *Tingkeban* involves a series of rituals that begins with several processions and ends with a *genduri* feast. The principal processions or activities within the *Tingkeban* tradition include the following:

The event begins with *sungkeman*. In Javanese, *sungkeman* means asking forgiveness from one's parents; in this case, the daughter, namely the wife from the woman's family, asks forgiveness from both parents, followed by the husband. *Sungkeman* seeks parental blessing and prayer so that the child to be born will be healthy and the mother will remain safe throughout the delivery process. This request for blessing and safety is directed to the parents. It is then followed by the *siraman* ritual. During the *siraman* procession, the husband and wife are doused with water drawn from seven wells and mixed with flower petals. In the community of Pangkalan Lunang Village, the water from seven wells is usually taken from the mosque, because it is believed to carry blessings, and the flowers mixed into it are not the classic setaman flowers used in Java; in Sumatra, people usually use colorful paper flowers that are more readily available in the local environment.<sup>23</sup>

The *siraman* ceremony is led by a customary elder, namely a woman of Javanese ethnicity. She begins bathing or pouring water over the bodies of the husband and wife while reciting shalawat and short Qur'anic surahs, followed by both sets of parents and family members who join in offering prayers together.<sup>24</sup>

During the *siraman* ceremony, the wife or pregnant mother first wears a *jarik* cloth or layers her clothing with a long cloth (*jarik*). The use of a *jarik* over clothing serves to ensure that a woman's aurat remains covered and to avoid impropriety; this is also understood as part of the Islamic teaching on modesty without replacing the *jarik* with another covering. The layering of the *jarik* over clothing is still carried out under the guidance of the female customary elder. The *jarik* used is changed seven times in accordance with the *Tingkeban* tradition. In this part of the ritual, the cloth may be changed repeatedly to display the mother's beauty.

After the *siraman* is completed, the ceremony proceeds to the splitting of the yellow coconut. In Javanese *Tingkeban* practice, people usually use a pair of yellow coconuts decorated

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<sup>21</sup> Tumsiyah, "Interview Pinisepuh" (Desa Pangkalan Lunang, 2026).

<sup>22</sup> Khusnul, "Interview Ibu Hamil" (Desa Pangkalan Lunang, 2026).

<sup>23</sup> Khusnul.

<sup>24</sup> Tumsiyah, "Interview Pinisepuh."

with images of the figures Kamajaya and Dewi Kamaratih, from which the husband chooses one. However, the people of Pangkalan Lunang Village usually use an ordinary coconut that is easy to obtain locally, without puppet images, and they use only a single coconut. The husband then prepares to split the coconut according to the instructions of the customary elder. If the coconut splits straight, it is believed that the couple will have a girl; however, if it does not split straight, it is also believed that they will have a girl.

After the *siraman* ceremony, the husband and wife symbolically sell rujak and cendol. These foods are distributed to guests and relatives who attend, and whoever is offered rujak and cendol is expected to “buy” them by paying whatever amount they sincerely wish to give. The symbolic sale of cendol and rujak is indeed part of the ceremonial sequence, using only the ingredients that have been prepared in modest quantity. The peak event and concluding series of the ceremony is the *genduri*. In Javanese, *genduri* means gathering together, similar to a *yasinan* recitation or a communal feast for neighboring community members invited to attend in the evening after the *maghrib* or *isya* prayer.

The *genduri* is led by an *ustad* who recites the prayers in a sequence similar to a *yasinan* gathering, beginning with an opening and ending with a closing prayer. *Genduri* is usually intended only for invited male guests, with the number of participants adjusted to the host family’s ability to provide food and drink for those who have been counted in advance. Even so, serving food to guests after the prayer recitation is not rigidly limited and depends on the capacity of the host family.

The *genduri* serves foods commonly enjoyed in Pangkalan Lunang Village, consisting not only of traditional Javanese dishes but also foods that have blended with the culinary characteristics of the village and local society, whose members come from different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>25</sup> Serving distinctively Javanese traditional foods is now relatively rare, such as red *jenang*, white *jenang*, *buceng ketan*, *keleman*, *cucumber*, *sego golong*, *sego semaron*, *sego rogoh*, *gedhang setangkep*, *dawet*, and *rujak*. *Keleman* refers to boiled peanuts and tubers. *Sego golong* is rice wrapped in small portions numbering seven or nine. *Sego semaron* refers to rice served in a container (*maron*) accompanied by side dishes such as noodles, spicy *sambal*, and *ayam ingkung* (a whole chicken). Even when the foods served are different, the intention remains one of almsgiving and supplication so that the prayers that have been recited may be answered by Allah.<sup>26</sup>

The progression from one ritual stage to the next in *Tingkeban* practice is interpreted as a form of acculturation among Javanese people that does not erase their habitual ways, even while they live outside Java as migrants. Acculturation between Javanese culture and local customs becomes a means of social connection. Not only Javanese people, but also local Malay residents

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<sup>25</sup> Tumsiyah.

<sup>26</sup> Kartim, “Interview Tokoh Agama.”

believe that the seven-month *Tingkeban* for a pregnant woman is a ritual prayer and a practice consistent with Islamic teachings, through which all may jointly hope for a safe childbirth. The implementation of *Tingkeban* is also regarded as a moment for strengthening kinship ties and social togetherness among residents.

### **The Meaning of Tingkeban in the Lives of Javanese People in North Sumatra**

The *Tingkeban* tradition may be read as a cultural text containing the meanings, symbols, values, and worldview of the society that practices it. Through a mode of thought that treats cultural practice as an arena for identity formation similar to analytical approaches that trace the encounter of Islam, Javanese culture, and the locality of Sumatra *Tingkeban* can be understood as an expression of Javanese Muslim identity that emerges not from a rupture with earlier traditions, but from a dialogical process of acculturation between Javanese heritage and Islamic teachings. Interpreting the *Tingkeban* tradition as an ethnoreligious expression is important because every stage of the ceremony, every utterance, prayer, symbolic object, and form of social participation constitutes a trace of cultural-religious negotiation. Thus, Islamic identity within *Tingkeban* is not read in formalistic terms, but as a living cultural identity. The relationship between Islam and Javanese culture develops through a dialogical process of acculturation, and Islamic practice often appears substantively through local traditions.<sup>27</sup>

Custom and religiosity are fused in a single symbolic act. The recitation of shalawat and short surahs from the Qur'an is an important marker that the entire ritual sequence, from the beginning, has been directed toward a religious atmosphere. The *siraman* ceremony is understood as an effort to purify both the physical and spiritual dimensions of the expectant mother and the baby still in the womb, and also as a symbol of purity, tranquility, and hope for a good life. In the community's view, *siraman* also represents an effort to prevent the negative traits of the parents from passing on to the child.<sup>28</sup> This belief shows that birth is not regarded merely as a biological event, but as a moral and spiritual event requiring both outward and inward preparedness. Thus, *siraman* presents a worldview in which a child's life is prepared from within the womb, not only through bodily care, but also through spiritual safeguarding and prayer.

*Siraman* is also understood as a way of calming the expectant mother's feelings before childbirth. At this point, the ritual works within the emotional experience of its participants. The atmosphere created by the presence of family members fosters a sense of security for the mother

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<sup>27</sup> Arif Wibowo, "Islam and Local Culture: Shifting Values of Religious Practices Among Modern Javanese Society," *Jurnal Keislaman* 8, no. 2 (September 1, 2025): 322–35, <https://doi.org/10.54298/jk.v8i2.552>.

<sup>28</sup> Zuli Dwi Rahmawati and Muhammad Munif, "Values of Character Education in The Javanese-Islamic Tradition: Tingkeban," *EDU-RELIGIA : Jurnal Keagamaan Dan Pembelajarannya* 6, no. 1 (2023): 73–88, <https://doi.org/10.52166/edu-religia.v6i1.4809>.

awaiting birth. In experiences such as this, the community does not separate psychological comfort from religious strength; both are present simultaneously in the same ritual. From this, it can be understood that tradition functions as a medium for sustaining life, not merely as the symbolic repetition of ancestral habit.<sup>29</sup>

The use of seven pieces of *jarik* cloth symbolizes help and hope, because the community associates it with the expectation that mother and baby will always remain under Allah's protection.<sup>30</sup> In this way, it becomes part of how the community gives ritual form to its hopes. The changing of the cloth is also read as a reminder that the arrival of a child must be received as a trust and gift from Allah. In this part, custom does not appear merely as a theological symbol, but as an affirmation of the community's view of family, responsibility, and divine grace.

At the same time, the changing of the cloth shows that the ritual is not carried out in an enclosed social space. The presence of residents who witness the procession also constitutes a form of social participation. The child to be born is therefore awaited not only by the nuclear family, but also welcomed as part of a shared communal life. Here, tradition becomes a collective event that affirms that birth always has social resonance and is not solely a private matter.

The symbol of the green coconut represents life and hope for the future of the child who is to be born.<sup>31</sup> Unlike practices that in some regions of Java still display puppet images of Kamajaya and Dewi Kamaratih, the local community no longer maintains such symbols. The coconut is chosen from the surrounding environment and invested with the hope that the child will be born with a pleasing appearance and pure character. What is preserved is not the detail of the older symbolic form. The community's concern is no longer directed toward visual mythology, but toward the child's moral quality as a gift requested from Allah. The coconut remains an important element in the ritual, but its meaning has been redirected toward a more ethical and religious orientation.

The socio-religious dimension of *Tingkeban* becomes visible in the family atmosphere created when the ceremony opens a space for togetherness. The sustenance possessed by the family is shared in a joyful atmosphere as an expression of gratitude for a pregnancy that has reached seven months. Here it becomes clear that what may appear to be a simple action actually embodies a rather deep moral outlook: sustenance should be circulated, happiness should be shared, and social life should be nurtured through generosity.

This procession also shows that *Tingkeban* possesses an integrative force in community life. Family members and residents are brought together in an atmosphere that is fluid, intimate,

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<sup>29</sup> Heru Syahputra, *Heru Syahputra, Filsafat Nusantara (Nilai-Nilai Kearifan Lokal Berbagai Suku Bangsa)* (Medan: Merdeka Kreasi, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> Kartim, "Interview Tokoh Agama."

<sup>31</sup> Tumsiyah, "Interview Pinisepuh."

and egalitarian. What comes to the fore is not difference in background, but a sense of togetherness that animates mutual assistance and concern for others. Tradition, in other words, becomes a way for the community to translate the teachings of gratitude and almsgiving into concrete, familiar, and easily understood forms.

The collective recitation of prayers, shalawat, and dhikr under the leadership of religious and community figures constitutes a supplication explicitly directed to Allah, in which the family awaiting birth places its hopes before Him, asking for safety for both mother and child while also acknowledging human limitation before Allah's power. Sustenance is understood as a gift from Allah and is therefore worthy of gratitude expressed through sharing with others.

An important feature of the religiosity of the Javanese Muslim community in Pangkalan Lunang Village is that the relationship with Allah is always lived alongside the maintenance of human relationships. The dialogical character displayed in this adaptation and way of viewing ritual confirms that changes in the ritual process show that tradition is not inherited in a frozen form. Rather, it undergoes simplification, selection, and adjustment of meaning in accordance with the world of values that lives within the community.<sup>32</sup> Taken as a whole, the sequence reveals that the *Tingkeban* tradition is interwoven with meanings that sustain the relationship between culture, religion, and social life. This tradition demonstrates that Javanese Muslims in Pangkalan Lunang Village do not live within a conflict between custom and religion. On the contrary, the two are woven together into a single, integrated cultural experience. From this, it can be understood that *Tingkeban* becomes one articulation of Javanese Muslim identity in Sumatra, as a practice of identity that endures while remaining close to the teachings of the sharia.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the *Tingkeban* tradition continues to live as a Javanese cultural heritage even though Javanese people in North Sumatra no longer reside fully within their original cultural landscape. The continuity of this tradition demonstrates the capacity of the community that sustains it to keep it alive, preserve it, and adapt it in everyday life. *Tingkeban* continues to be maintained through inherited patterns passed down from generation to generation, yet at the same time it has undergone shifts in meaning and practice in accordance with the knowledge, experience, and life orientation of the community as these continue to develop. Thus, *Tingkeban* appears as an enduring customary legacy that keeps moving, adapting, and acquiring new relevance within the social space of migrant Javanese communities.

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<sup>32</sup> Yusril Fahmi Adam, Elza Ramona, and Imam Muhsin, "Islam Melayu Dan Islam Jawa: Studi Komparatif Akulturasi Islam Dan Kebudayaan Dalam Perspektif Sejarah," *Muslim Heritage* 8, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 133–52, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v8i1.5723>.

In this study, the *Tingkeban* tradition is read as a form of Islam–Javanese acculturation that reveals how the community affirms its identity through cultural practice. This acculturation is visible in efforts to unite elements of Javanese tradition with Islamic teachings, so that *Tingkeban* is practiced not merely as custom, but also understood as a medium of prayer, gratitude, safety, and surrender to Allah. Islamic identity is not formed through a rupture with cultural heritage, but through the reinterpretation of tradition within the framework of Islamic values. The implications of these findings show that efforts to preserve the *Tingkeban* tradition are not limited to the conservation of culture alone; they also constitute an affirmation of the identity of migrant Javanese communities within a fluid dialogical space without altering the essence of the tradition.

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