

Religious and Cultural Dimensions of the Rebo Wekasan Tradition in Gresik, Indonesia: An Ethnographic Study

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Indonesia has a rich cultural tradition that reflects the religious and social values of the local community. One of these traditions is Rebo Wekasan which is held on the last Wednesday of the month of Shafar. This tradition is still preserved by the people of Sacred Village, Manyar District, Gresik Regency, even though the times continue to change.

Aims: This research aims to uncover the historical origins, symbolic meaning, and procession of the implementation of the Rebo Wekasan Tradition in the Holy Village, as well as understand the role of these traditions in strengthening the collective identity and religious expression of the community.

Methods: The research uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, direct observation of traditional activities, and documentation. Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.

Result: The results of the study show that the Rebo Wekasan Tradition has a close relationship with the history of the spread of Islam by Sheikh Jamaluddin Malik. This tradition contains the values of gratitude, spiritual protection, friendship, and almsgiving. The processions carried out included Qur'an sermons, tumpeng carnivals, joint prayers, istighosah, and people's markets. This tradition not only survives but also adapts to the social dynamics of modern society.

Conclusion: The Rebo Wekasan tradition remains the cultural and spiritual binder of the people of the Holy Village. It becomes a meaningful space for social interaction and the preservation of local wisdom values across generations. Its sustainability proves that cultural traditions can survive and adapt in the midst of changing times.

Keywords: Rebo Wekasan, Cultural Traditions, Religious Rituals, Local Wisdom, Ethnographic Studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a very high cultural richness, including religious traditions that are still preserved today (Hidayatulloh et al., 2024; Indriani et al., 2022, 2022; Rofiq, 2019). One such tradition is *Rebo Wekasan*, believed by communities as a ritual of warding off misfortune (*tolak bala*) and expressing gratitude to God (Mauladah et al., 2022; Yanti, 2020; Zuraidah & Sudrajat, 2022a). The *Rebo Wekasan* tradition reflects the complex interplay of religious, social and cultural values, offering meaningful insights into human relations with the divine, as well as with one another.

However, in practice, there is a gap between the noble values of these traditions and the reality of modern society. Many young generations have begun to forget the meaning of the *Rebo Wekasan* procession and are only interested in entertainment aspects such as the night market, while spiritual and religious values are beginning to be neglected (Bety & Ali, 2023a; Membara & Purnomo, 2024). This shows a shift in meaning that can threaten the preservation of tradition as a local cultural identity.

In the current era of globalisation, which often marginalises local culture, it is important to document and interpret indigenous practices such as *Rebo Wekasan*. This research project aims to critically explore the meaning, procession and transformation of *Rebo Wekasan* through ethnographic inquiry. This will contribute to the revitalisation of cultural awareness among communities.

This research also fills a gap in academic studies because there is still limited scientific documentation related to the meaning and procession of the *Rebo Wekasan* Tradition specifically in Sacred Village, Manyar District, Gresik. With an ethnographic approach, this study presents a novelty in looking at traditions from the perspective of local culture that is bound by the history of Islamization by figures such as Sunan Giri, so that it has a distinctive historical and religious value.

The choice of *Rebo Wekasan* as the core variable is based on its pivotal role in the collective life of the Sacred Village. It is more than just a ritual; it functions as a cultural and spiritual ecosystem, fostering *tasyakuran*, intergenerational bonding and a sense of communal identity (Holis & Silvia, 2024; Rahman et al., 2022; Rosyid & Kushidayati, 2022). Therefore, it is important to dig deeper into the meanings and practices that surround these traditions.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive description of the historical roots, symbolic interpretations and ritual practices of the *Rebo Wekasan* tradition in Gresik. This research will contribute to both the literature on Islamic cultural traditions and the practical framework for preserving local knowledge in modern contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using an ethnographic method (Gertner et al., 2021; Nascimento et al., 2022; Toye et al., 2021). The research aimed to explore and describe the cultural and religious meanings behind the Rebo Wekasan tradition in Desa Suci, Kecamatan Manyar, Kabupaten Gresik. Ethnography was chosen as it allows in-depth understanding of social practices, symbols, and the lived experiences of the community.

Participants

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they were relevant to the research objectives. A total of eight participants were interviewed:

- three community elders (tokoh sepuh), who are tradition bearers.
- two religious leaders (an ustadz and an imam from the local mosque).
- two local youth organisers and one village official involved in cultural preservation.

These individuals were chosen due to their direct involvement in the annual Rebo Wekasan ritual and their knowledge of its historical and cultural significance.

Population and the Methods of Sampling, Instrumentation

The population consisted of the entire community of Desa Suci involved in the Rebo Wekasan tradition. The sampling technique was purposive sampling, selecting informants based on their relevance and experience. The data collection instruments included semi-structured interview guidelines and observation sheets. Questions focused on the history, meaning, and implementation of the tradition. Responses were categorized thematically. Since this is a qualitative study, psychometric testing (e.g., scoring, validity, reliability) in the quantitative sense was not applicable; however, credibility was ensured through triangulation and peer debriefing.

InstrumentThe instruments used were:

- **Interview guidelines:** Semi-structured with open-ended questions regarding the tradition's history, meaning, and procession.
- **Observation checklist:** Used to record the actual process and community engagement during the event.
- **Documentation:** Photos, videos, and documents related to the tradition, including local archives or past event records.
- **Procedures and Time Frame**

The study was conducted in Desa Suci during the implementation of the Rebo Wekasan tradition in 2023. The research process included several stages: heuristic (problem identification), data collection (interview, observation, documentation), data reduction and selection, interpretation, and final reporting. The fieldwork took place within a defined period covering the days before, during, and after the Rebo Wekasan rituals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The implementation of the Rebo Wekasan Tradition in the Sacred Village, Manyar Gresik District, shows the continuity of cultural values and religiosity that has been going on for hundreds of years. This tradition is closely related to the early history of the establishment of the Holy Village which is believed to be the location of the spread of Islam by Sunan Giri's disciple, Sheikh Jamaluddin Malik. In the oral history of the community, Rebo Wekasan is not only a religious ritual, but also a form of respect for the spiritual heritage that forms the identity of the village.

The meaning contained in the Rebo Wekasan Tradition has a strong religious and social dimension. The community interprets it as a form of gratitude to Allah SWT for the safety and sustenance that has been given. In addition, this activity is also a means of *tabarrukan* (seeking blessings), establishing *friendship* between families and villagers, and fostering the spirit of sharing through almsgiving. These values show that Rebo Wekasan is a symbol of harmonious and religious communal life.

In its implementation, this tradition began with Qur'an Khotmil activities carried out by religious leaders and mosque youth. This activity was held as a form of respect for the Qur'an and the hope that the village would be kept away from disasters. After that, a cultural carnival was carried out by bringing Tumpeng Agung around the village. This carnival was accompanied by a performance of local art accompanied by prayers for salvation from village elders.

The peak momentum of the Rebo Wekasan Tradition is the celebration and joint prayer held at the center of village activities. Residents from various walks of life gathered to chant prayers for safety and blessings. This activity not only contains religious processions, but also presents a photography exhibition that documents the history and implementation of traditions from time to time. This is a concrete step in maintaining the community's collective memory of the importance of cultural preservation.

This tradition also includes night worship activities such as Istighosah, Prophet's Prayer, and Absolute Sunnah Prayer which are carried out in congregation at the village mosque. This procession shows how tradition and worship go hand in hand and strengthen each other. In the context of the Sacred Village community, worship activities are not only an individual ritual, but also an inseparable part of deep-rooted social-communal life.

As the closing of the series of events, the community held a people's market that was open to the public. This activity is a special attraction as well as local economic media involving village MSMEs. Even though it is entertainment, this activity is still imbued with the spirit of togetherness and gratitude that is the core of Rebo Wekasan. With the whole series, it seems that this tradition not only survives symbolically, but also continues to develop as a living culture that is adaptive to the times.

Discussion

The Rebo Wekasan tradition in Desa Suci, Gresik, is not just a ritual; it is a cultural expression that integrates religious belief, historical memory and social cohesion. Symbolic acts such as prayers, communal meals (*slametan*) and night markets serve as a means through which the community can reaffirm its collective identity and spiritual connection (Bety & Ali, 2023b; Nurjannah, 2017; Suhartik et al., 2025; Supriadin & Pababari, 2024; Zuraidah & Sudrajat, 2022b). This tradition has proven to be still relevant as a forum for instilling religious and social values that strengthen close relationships between citizens. The implementation of rituals and joint activities in this tradition reflects local wisdom that is able to strengthen community identity and contribute to the development of collective character based on spirituality and togetherness (Damayanti et al., 2020; Sofyanto & Kanzunnudin, 2023).

In terms of scientific contributions, this research enriches the ethnographic study of religious culture that still survives authentically in the midst of modernity. This study succeeded in illustrating

how a tradition is not only maintained for generations, but also contains a deep meaning that becomes a guideline for people's lives. Documentation and in-depth analysis of the values, processions, and history of Rebo Wekasan provide additional valuable literature in the study of cultural history, anthropology, and education (Bastaman & Fortuna, 2019; Chalik, 2016; Fais et al., 2024).

However, this research has limitations, especially in a narrow scope because it only focuses on one location, namely the Sacred Village. This condition makes the findings not yet generalizable to other regions that may have differences in the form and meaning of the implementation of similar traditions. In addition, the qualitative approach used emphasizes more on description and interpretation, so that it does not reach the measurement of the quantitative impact of the sustainability of tradition on the social life of the community.

Based on these findings and limitations, it is suggested that further research involve more locations with a comparative approach in order to gain a broader and contextual understanding. Researchers can also develop this study through a multidisciplinary approach involving sociological, psychological, and educational aspects, so as to be able to evaluate the impact of tradition more comprehensively. Local governments and educational institutions are also expected to use the results of this research as a basis for developing cultural preservation strategies that are in accordance with the social dynamics of the current society. Spiritually, the tradition exhibits a popular form of religiosity that coexists alongside normative Islam. Rather than contradicting formal religious teachings, it expresses a contextualised religiosity that is grounded in lived experience. This provides an insight into how communities negotiate spiritual needs within cultural frameworks, which is a relevant theme in religious studies and Islamic anthropology.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the Rebo Wekasan Tradition in the Sacred Village, Manyar District, Gresik Regency is an important part of cultural heritage that is closely integrated with the history and spirituality of the local community. This tradition not only serves as a religious ritual, but also as a means of social and communal expression that binds relationships between citizens. Values such as gratitude, prayer for safety, togetherness, and the spirit of sharing continue to live on through various processions, ranging from Qur'anic sermons, cultural carnivals, to joint prayers and night worship.

The preservation of this tradition shows that the community still has a collective awareness of the importance of maintaining cultural identity in the midst of changing times. The Rebo Wekasan tradition is a reflection that religious-based local cultural practices can continue to exist and adapt, even contributing to strengthening the character of the community. Therefore, the sustainability of these traditions should be supported not only by indigenous peoples, but also by governments and educational institutions through programs that facilitate the regeneration and documentation of local culture.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Contributions to this research were made by LM who was responsible for problem formulation, field data collection, and writing the main manuscript. YA plays a role in providing academic guidance, strengthening theory, and validating the collected data. ZA also contributes to the preparation of methodologies, the development of interview instruments, and the revision of manuscripts to ensure conformity with scientific principles.

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