

NYUWUN SLAMET; LOCAL WISDOM OF JAVANESE RURAL PEOPLE IN DEALING WITH COVID-19 PANDEMIC THROUGH REQUEST IN SLAMETAN RITE

Mukhlas Alkaf^{1*}, Andrik Purwasito², I Nyoman Murtana³, Wakit Abdullah⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Sebelas Maret University

* mukhlasalkaf@gmail.com

Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic effect has resulted in restlessness within community. Some are restless because of decreased job and business opportunities, fear of being infected with disease, fear of losing the closed and beloved one, etc. This article tries to raise a Javanese community's local wisdom, Slametan. Slametan is a form of local wisdom existing within Javanese people containing an action functioning to be a medium to request God to give safety. In principle, slametan rite is one of human actions to communicate with the Creator. Through the rite, human beings feel that what they ask will be granted. Human beings doing this are also sure and suggested that those having done the rite will get safety and protection effect. This belief will further create self-confidence and the feeling of secure among them in working and continuing the life.

Keywords: Covid, slametan, rite, safety.

A. INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, all people in the world were shocked by a deadly disease induced by virus. The virus is called Corona or Covid-19. This virus is dangerous as it leads to death, respiratory function impairment, and makes the patients developing organ dysfunction in their lifetime. More dangerously, this virus can be transmitted very easily through physical contact between human beings who have contact or are close to each other. This disease has taken a large number of life tolls; in Indonesia it has taken 40,581 life tolls until this article writing. The terrible circumstance leads to the fear within community.

Covid-19 pandemic has driven the leaders and the policy makers throughout world to be responsive to and care about their people safety. It can be seen from such policy as ceasing school activity, nullifying face-to-face lecturing, prohibiting people from being involved in crowd, avoiding crowd, and prohibiting people from going abroad for pilgrimage, recreation and tourism, or ordinary visit purpose.

Regulation or policy established by the government, of course, affects all sectors significantly, including economic and social lives of society. Some information mentions that many people will lose their job due to corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic effect; it will be difficult to imagine how social problems will keep emerging when unemployment rate increases. Many problems from the increase in criminality rate to the malnutrition will be the problems occurring if this pandemic is prolonged.

Covid-19 pandemic effect has resulted in restlessness within community. Some are restless because of decreased job and business opportunities, fear of being infected with disease, fear of losing the closed and beloved one, etc. Various expressions emerge within society as the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This article will try to raise a local wisdom of Javanese community, Slametan. Slametan is a form of local wisdom existing within Javanese people containing an action functioning to be a medium to request God to give safety. It includes the safety or protection from harvest failure, disaster, and pest and disease attack. This fact is interesting when rural people, with modesty they have, are also affected by the presence of corona virus pandemic. The fear of corona disease effect, both socially and medically, has resulted in discomfort in the citizens. At that time, they use the activities they do routinely, i.e. traditional rite of slametan, as a medium to request God to give safety. The activity psychologically has contributed to grow the feeling of comfort in the citizens.

B. RESEARCH LOCATION

This article departed from the author's research in Lencoh Hamlet, Lencoh Village, Selo Sub District, Boyolali Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. This location was selected because its people still conducting *slametan* rite as a traditional ceremony believed to be able to be a media of communication between citizens and invisible power believed to have power to give safety. This region shows typical rural circumstance in which its members of community tend to have homogeneous profession as field and vegetable farmers and strong social bond and cooperative principle such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) are still implemented. Mutual cooperation concept with high value is a concept closely related to Indonesians' life as farmers in agrarian community. In some Indonesian regions, there has been mutual cooperation practice but in different names and terms since many years ago. Something interesting in this mutual cooperation is that a form of cooperation is to pray for each other. Praying for each other is sometimes conducted massively or collectively. However, some other time it is conducted alone at their home. In *slametan* rite, people assemble and pray for each other together.

C. METHOD

This study is a qualitative one using phenomenological approach. In the research using such method, according to Moleong (1993:170), an author describes actual (field) condition in accordance with the existing phenomenon without reengineering. The methods of collecting data used were interview, observation, and documentation. Process of collecting data was carried out in relaxed and warm kinship situation to make their meaning, cognitive structure, thinking, emotionality, spirituality, comprehension, assessment, happiness, and mood can be revealed more in-depth and comprehensively.

D. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

DEFINITION OF SLAMETAN

In Javanese community, particularly in rural area, traditional rite of *slametan* is an action intended to deal with the power beyond human power. The power intended grows from subconscious realm as the manifestation of human beings' limitation in facing life challenge coming from inside themselves or surrounding nature. Traditional rite or so called *slametan* is the most important element in Javanese religion system.

Slametan is a product of syncretism of animism, Hindu-Budha and Islam cultures, so that it contains cultural, mythical, and religious elements. It can be seen from the habit performed by Javanese people who always combine the performance of tradition and religion law (*sharia*) (e.g. *slametan*, *sekaten*, *grebeg maulud* and *grebeg syawal*). Javanese spiritualism can be embodied into Verbal and Non-Verbal Symbols with interpretation in daily life. For that reason, Javanese life has been mapped into various rules such as *tata krama* or etiquette (norms in Javanese ethics), custom/tradition (regulating the harmony of society), religion (regulating formal relation to God), and *narima*, *sabar*, *waspada – eling* (introspection), *andap asor* (humility), and *prasajo* (modesty). (Sutiyono, 2013:107).

Slametan plays an important role in Javanese society structure, so that the researchers of Javanese culture often make it the focus of study. A Javanese Islamic researcher, Clifford Geertz, puts *slametan* to be basic element of custom to define *abangan* community. Then, other Javanese cultural researchers such as Koentjaraningrat, Mark Woodward, and Andrew Beatty, say that this interestedness eventually generates various claim against rite. The discourse becoming the topic of discussion for the researchers (particularly Geertz and Woodward) is, among others, related to the following question: is the root of *slametan* Islam tradition or Javanese animistic tradition? In this case, Geertz states that *slametan* tradition comes from the second tradition. In contrast to Geertz, Woodward considers that the spirit of *slametan* is Islam rather than Javanese animism (Hilmy, 1999: 103).

Slametan is basically a religious rite or action to achieve safety. The rite generally implies Islam religion tenets mixed with the belief before Islam's coming. Clifford Geertz thinks that the foundation of Slametan ritual belief is a creed "Islam Abangan", because in addition to implementing Islam religion tenet, they still believe in the presence of ancestral power still emphasizing on animistic, Hindu, and Islam elements. Consequently, syncretic community emerges, the one combining the elements of tenet having no relation at all to Islam tenet religion coming from Arab states. It is an attempt to look for the physical-spiritual balance. Religion coming and adhered to by the people before the new one coming remains to be maintained and inherent to local community's life. It can be seen from either ritual or daily ceremony.

In principle, *slametan* rite is one of human actions to communicate with the Creator. Through the rite, human beings feel that what they ask will be granted or they feel satisfied because they have fulfilled their obligation. The rite is conducted related to the community life or belief. The traditional ceremony intended includes, among others, *bersih dusun* (cleaning the village), *ruwatan*, *nadaran*, *khitanan* (circumcision) and wedding. In relation to the argument aforementioned, Koentjaraningrat (1977: 105) states that:

Hampir pada setiap peristiwa yang dianggap penting baik menyangkut segi kehidupan seseorang, baik yang bersifat keagamaan atau kepercayaan maupun mengenai usaha seseorang dalam mencari penghidupan pelaksanaannya selalu disertai dengan upacara.

Meaning: Almost all events considered important, pertaining to an individual's life aspect, either religiosity or belief or an individual's attempt of earning living, are always accompanied with ceremony (rite).

Furthermore, Koentjaraningrat (1977: 340-341) explains that *slametan* ceremony can be classified into four categories: firstly, *slametan* to celebrate an individual's life cycle such as seven-month gestation, birth, first hair cutting ceremony, first land touching ceremony, ear sticking ceremony, circumcision, death, and moments following death. Secondly, *slametan* is related to the moment of *bersih dusun* (cleaning village), cultivating land, and rice harvest. Thirdly, *slametan* is related to Islamic great days and months. Fourthly, *slametan* at certain moment is related to the events like far traveling, warding off disaster (*ngruwat*), and promise to do something having healed from sickness (*nadar*).

Furthermore, according to Masruri (2013: 230), in performing hereditary Javanese tradition in the attempt of asking for blessing and etc, the most prominent one is *slametan* rite. *Slametan* is the original Javanese manifestation. It contains symbols of *sesaji* (offering) and uses certain spell. *Slametan* is the manifestation of ritual action coming from previous religious texts. *Slametan* and mystic rites are two inseparable things. Both of them support each other and refer to essential spirituality.

Basically, the rite like *slametan* ceremony is a series of words and actions done by the adherents of religion using certain stuffs, tools, and equipment, at certain place and wearing certain costume. Similarly, in *slametan* rite, many equipments and tools should be prepared and used. Ritual or rite is conducted to get much blessing or livelihood from a job. For example, a rite is conducted to ward off disaster or to deal with the change or cycle in human life like birth, marriage, and death (Bustanuddin, 2007: 95). Furthermore, essentially rite is a medium to mediate two or more different entities, and to be a balance of cosmos. Rite is a transformation from profane to sacred attitude (Rumahuru, 2018: 22)

Overall, the discussion in this article will address the implementation of *Slametan* rite in Lencoh Hamlet. Lencoh Hamlet is one of hamlets in Lencoh Village, Selo Sub District, Boyolali Regency. *Slametan* is a means believed to be close to God the Creator of earth along with its content. It can be seen from symbolic actions, including prayer and *sesaji* existing in the ceremony. This prayer is an expression of words containing the request and gratitude to God and for safety from disaster and disease. Geertz (1981: 6) said that:

Recently, religious system of hamlet commonly consists of a balanced integration between animism, Hindu, and Islam elements, a Javanese syncretism constituting the actual folk tradition in more complex situation (Geertz, 1981: 6).

The daily life system of community builds on religion tenet and belief element constituting old custom and habit different from official tenet of Islam religion coming from Arabian states. In addition, it can be said that Lencoh Hamlet people still uphold norms in religion and likewise customary law coming from ancestral inheritance belief system reflecting syncretism of Islam and Javanese religion tenet (*kejawen*).

In starting *Slametan* rite, this prayer can usually be done by the elders of art during staging time around the beginning of *Slametan* rite, followed with complete *sesaji*. Prayer started with burning incense (*kemenyan*). The prayer is as follows:

The prayer read when burning *kemenyan* (incense)

smelahirokmanirokim

Salam solahu salam wangalaikum salam 3 x

Klenggang jati oborane menyan

Krenyes jati arenge dupa

Mletuk putih kukuse menyan

Murup mujad tumelung

Menyang ngarep, ngarepe Mekah,

Mekahe, Medinah, Medinahe danyang

Para danyang dusun...

atau redi.....

Medinahe para danyang ingkang lenggahi.

It is then followed with other prayers essentially corresponding to the objective and purpose of traditional rite, as follows:

smelahirokmanirokim

Panggang sekul tumpen, tumbasan peken sak pirantinipun sedaya kalian sekul redi. Panggang

tumpeng kangge metreni Kyai Slamet Saloka, Nyi Slamet Saloka, Kyai Tentrem, kyai Sunan

Bonang sak wadyabalane kang duweni gongsa lan kaiyan dinten menika kangge mertu dusun,

inggi pentas kesenian kanngge merti dusun lan rombongan kesenian sedaya lan masyarakat Lencoh nyuwun berbah pangestu paringono bagas waras slamet. Saha paringono ayam-ayem tentrem jenjem, paringono wilujeng sapangandape, sapaninggile ampun wonten saru sikune. Lajeng ingkang darbe gangsa jaler menika dipun suwun rokok lan ngunjuk dahar sekul sapirantosipun sedaya. Darbe gangsa ingkang istri menika dipun aturi ngganten ngunjuk dahar sekul sapirantosipun sedaya. Lan sedaya dipun suwun ngasta piyambak-piyambak mbok menawi wonten kekiranganipun dipun caosi arta dipun suwun tumbas wonten peken ageng piyambak. ...dst

In each of *Slametan* rite, *uborampe* or some equipment like *sesaji* or *sajen* (offering) is usually provided. The *sesaji* is the expression of humans (people) service to Holy or ancestral dead spirits, as the embryo of the human or community life. *Sesaji* is a symbol or tenet to human beings in undertaking their life; through providing *sesaji* or other ritual equipment, human beings have been accustomed to using symbolic language in daily life. Nevertheless, the definition of symbol is dependent on socio-cultural condition of and perception of community still believing in the presence of ritual value containing power.

In fact, one of spiritual elements inherent to Java land is *sesaji* used to be tribute to *Ilahi* (Allah) and other invisible creatures. However, this ritual is considered as very strange when compared with modernization and globalization. So many cultures existing in Java Island are inseparable from spiritual elements. One of strong spiritual elements is beliefs in myth (Haniyaturreoufah. 2013: 13). However, those still believing in it in the implementation of *sesajen* cultural rite functions as the bridge connecting human world to God. This activity is an attempt of achieving safety in life, and becomes the community's customary rite. These inherent customary and cultural values become a distinctive identity indirectly (Adam U.J et al, 2019: 25).

The most important of *sesaji* in *slametan* rite as the part of ritual equipment consists of *tumpeng*, *ingkung ayam*, *kalapa duwegan*, *bubur putih* and *bebur merah*, men and women's costumes, *setaman*, *rujak*, *pangradian kembang* and equipped with *anglo* (brazier) to burn incense.

A variety of *sesaji* or *sajen* served in the rite has their own symbolic meaning. The interpretation is a part of local wisdom essentially becoming *pepeling* (reminder) and life wisdom tenet to all citizens. For example, *Tumpeng* (cone-shaped rice), equipped with "*ingkung ayam*" (whole chicken with head facing upward) (*rasulan*), is the rice cooked with coconut milk, turmeric, salt, *salam* leaf shaped resembling cone and covered with banana leaves. *Nasi tumpeng* symbolizes the hierarchy of human life that will achieve glory. The *nasi tumpeng* covered with banana leaves symbolizes the glory that should be achieved through hard work and the help of God as the supernatural power. Meanwhile, *sego ambeng* is made of semi round-shaped white rice put on plate and *lanyahan* (*sayur telur puyuh*, *tempe*, *chicken*, *peyek*, *gereh*, *kerupuk udang*) symbolizing that the ones existing in the graves, including male, female, old, young, well-maintained and not well-maintained.

NYUWUN SLAMET DALAM RITUAL SLAMETAN

In relation to Covid-19 pandemic, Lencoh people utilize *Rejeban* customary ceremony moment. *Rejeban* is a rite to clean the hamlet (*bersih dusun*) held in Dukuh Lencoh (Lencoh Hamlet) and a tradition conducted in relation to the schedule of *bersih dusun* coming on *Rejeb* month. In addition to being held frequently by Lencoh people, in Lencoh Village, Sela Sub District, Boyolali Regency, this *bersih dusun* ceremony is also held by Javanese people in general. The rite is a manifestation of ancestral old habit, the existence of which is still maintained until today as an activity believed and conducted routinely annually. To Lencoh people, *bersih dusun* rite is important to their sustainable life in society. Along with time development, this habit of holding rite is still performed particularly in rural areas such as Lencoh Hamlet. As such, it indicates that Lencoh people's life is still generally colored with old belief as their ancestral heritage.

The implementation of *bersih dusun* rite in Lencoh Village is a means of being closer to God that creates universe as well as anything within it. It can be seen from such symbolic actions as prayer

and *sesaji* existing in the rite. This prayer is an expression of words containing request and gratitude to God. *Sesaji* can be meal or raw food material intended to god or *dhanyang leluhur* or *Dewi Sri*. Believes in God (the Creator), in *dhanyang leluhur* of hamlet, and in *Dewi Sri* are mixed into a creed becoming the guidance for the life of people in Lencoh Hamlet as a step to achieve life welfare and safety. *Bersih dusun* tradition in Lencoh Hamlet has been conducted since a long time ago until today and when did this *bersih dusun* tradition begin is not been known certainly.

Lencoh people perceive that their life in their hamlet is always safeguarded from dangers by ancestor spirit. Therefore, they think that they should pay attention to the invisible creatures at certain time by serving *sesaji* or *sajen*. People serve it by holding the rite to clean hamlet (*merti dusun*) held on Rejeb month, on the day considered good by the people (e.g. *Minggu Legi* or Sunday Legi). In addition, people also prepare small *sajen* for their ancestor spirits, for example they sow various flowers on the crossroad, *sendhang* (water source), *pundhen* (grave) considered *wingit* or *angker* (sacred).



Figure 1. A Variety of *sesajen* in *Rejeban* rite
(Photograph is collected by: Mukhlas Alkaf)

Sesaji derived from the word *saji* meaning *puja(an)* (adoration), *semah*. The word *sesaji* means providing *sajian* (adoration) to the invisible spirit. Anton M. Moeliono, in Indonesian Big Dictionary (1989: 768), explains that the word *sesaji* derives from the word *saji* meaning meal containing food and side dish provided in a place to be eaten. This word *saji* is also often called *sajen*, containing food, flowers, and etc served to the invisible creature. Furthermore, the word *bersaji* means to dedicate *sajian* in religious rite conducted symbolically aiming to communicate with the supernatural power, by means of dedicating food and other objects symbolizing the purpose of such communication.



Figure 2. Dancers in Rejeban rite in make-up room preparing to perform Buto Birowo dance

In this year *Rejeban* rite, Lencoh people do *umbul donga* (praying) specifically, attempt to ask for safety (*nyuwun slamet*) for themselves, their family, and all citizens from Covid-19 pandemic. Just like in ordinary *rejeban* rite, prayer is read, folk art is performed, and *sesaji* (*sajen*) is served.



Figure 3. People do *Umbul Dungo* (praying) to ask for safety particularly from Covid-19 pandemic (Photograph is collected by Mukhlas Alkaf)

This research reveals that Lencoh Hamlet people utilize *rejeban* moment as a means of building creed and of asking God as well as the ancestral spirits of hamlet (*danyang-danyang*) to protect them. Lencoh Hamlet people believe that *dhanyang* is the invisible spirit or creature dwells universe around their residence (e.g. in water source or *sendhang*, on the house rooftop, on the mountain, on the crossroad or in the middle of road). They perceive that *sendhang* is always used by Lencoh Hamlet and surrounding people to fulfill their daily needs such as bathing, washing, cooking, and watering the plant. Therefore, Lencoh Hamlet people choose water source or *sendhang* to be one of ritual venues. Similarly, it is chosen because it is located close to the dwelling, so that they expect that the creature can protect the houses and the dwellers. The rite held on the crossroad or in the middle of road is intended to ask for safety wherever they go. The invisible creatures are considered as playing important role in human life. They believe that they (*dhanyangs*) will be happy if humans pay attention to them, and they will be angry if humans ignore them. Therefore, Lencoh Hamlet people will reward them annually by holding *selamatan dusun* along with the existence of *sesajen* for the spirit and the performance of art. In relation to Covid-19 pandemic, the people believe that any

request for safety (*penyuwunan slamet*) by conducting a series of *rejeban* customary rite will elicit blessing and the granting of their prayer.

CONCLUSION

Considering the elaboration and discussion above, several conclusions can be drawn. The people in Lencoh Hamlet, Selapada Sub District are generally a traditional community still influenced by their ancestral traditional values.

In Java Island in general and in Lencoh Hamlet in particular, *slametan* tradition is still a hereditary cultural tradition still preserved over times until today. Nevertheless, its implementation process transforms and is affected by time development and people's demand. The transformation can be seen from the mechanism of *slametan* from invitation, prayer, *uborampe*, and *sesaji*. However, the transformation in *slametan* tradition does not reduce its spiritual interpretation and magic. For that reason, *slametan* remains to be preserved and is the typical spiritual value of Javanese community.

Slametan held by people in Lencoh Hamlet is basically a tradition that has been conducted from one generation to the next. *Slametan* involving community (people) here is a form of comprehension on human life process from birth to death. In Max Scheler's (2012) phenomenological perspective, *slametan* existing in Lencoh community is a phenomenon emphasizing on intuitive experience with something existing, because *slametan* is human's attempt of finding the existence of a reality. *Slametan* is a phenomenon present as the sign of something behind the rite itself. *Slametan* is the form of comprehension on an experience and a rite reflecting human's religious experience occurring due to human's limitation and belief in the presence of something beyond himself, surrounding and likewise regulating his life. The belief in the existence of *danyangs* (invisible creature) who *mbahurekso* (master) a region is the output of such comprehension. So, *slametan* existing in Lencoh community is a direct action reflecting an intuitive experience with object awareness.

All members of Lencoh community adhere to Islam but the fact shows that the residual animistic, dynamistic, and totemic creeds mixed with Hindu and Buddha are still perceived very strongly. It can be seen from human behavior related closely to a series of ritual ceremony held periodically or incidentally or the ceremony pertaining to human life cycle. The activity in ceremony is a habit done customarily based on ancestral tenets to achieve safety level. Observed closely, the local community's belief system still believes on syncretic matters.

Local people seem to follow global information reporting the Covid-19 pandemic. Their understanding on the disease's danger has resulted in distinctive worries among them. They worry about their, their family, and their beloved ones' safety. They try to fight against such worries and fears with local wisdom they have had from one generation to the next, i.e. through praying and holding rite to ask for safety, called *slametan*. Their belief that the rite can be a medium of communication between people and God, along with invisible creatures (*danyang-danyang*) mastering the hamlet, has generated energy including tranquility, bravery, and self-confidence to continue life.

This traditional belief of Javanese Islam adherent community is in line with Clifford Geertz's perspective, confirmed by Beatty (1996) representing that Javanese Islam is essentially syncretic Islam or the combination of Islam, Hindu/Budha, and animistic belief. Through multivocality approach, it can be said that Javanese Islam is actually the syncretic Islam. Javanese Islam pattern is the combination of various uniting elements that can no longer be known as Islam. In fact, Islam is on the surface only, but the essence is local beliefs. It is this religious tradition that is performed by Lencoh hamlet community today.

When Covid-19 pandemic threatens all members of community, they perform *penyuwunan slamet* (rite to ask for safety) through procedure and mechanism they believe in and have learnt hereditarily. They perform a variety of *slametan* rites during covid-19 pandemic, primarily to tranquilize their heart and expectedly to avoid any disruption against themselves and their family, in order to live quietly, free of Covid-19 disease and hazard.

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