

## Symbolism and Cultural Representation in Lomban Tradition in Jepara

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### ABSTRACT

The Lomban tradition in Jepara is a cultural celebration rich in symbolism and historical significance for the local community. This tradition is conducted as an expression of gratitude for the bounty from the sea and a plea for safety in fishing activities. Over time, Lomban has undergone transformations in its execution and symbolic meanings. This research aims to uncover the symbolism within the elements of the Lomban tradition, such as the procession of offerings, traditional dances, and the use of other symbols, using approaches from cultural anthropology and semiotics. The research methods employed include qualitative data from interviews, direct observations, and literature analysis to provide a deep understanding of the cultural values and beliefs of the Jepara community embedded in Lomban. The findings show that Lomban is not merely a customary ceremony but also a reflection of the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, playing a significant role in preserving local cultural identity. The implications of this research underscore the importance of preserving and honoring cultural traditions as an integral part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Lomban tradition, Jepara, cultural symbolism, offerings, cultural anthropology.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Esten (1993:11) Tradition is a hereditary habit of a group of people based on the cultural values of the community concerned. (Indonesian National Encyclopedia, 1990: 4141) defines tradition as a habit that is passed down from one generation to the next generation from generation to generation, the inherited habits include cultural values, including customs, social systems, knowledge systems, languages, arts and belief systems. In the context of cultural anthropology, tradition functions as an integrative mechanism that strengthens social cohesion and solidarity between community members. Tradition also plays a role in the enculturation process, which is the process in which individuals learn and internalize the prevailing cultural values and norms. In addition, tradition can be seen as a reflection of the

dynamics of history and social change, where traditional practices can undergo adaptation and transformation along with the times. According to the Deputy for Maritime Sovereignty of the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs, Indonesia has 17,508 islands and is the largest in the world. Indonesia offers a diversity of traditions that include traditional ceremonies, dances, music, clothing and festivals that are unique to each region. These traditions reflect the long history and influence of various cultures whose shadows cannot simply disappear. Traditions have become part of aspects of life that originated in the past and are practiced repeatedly for generations, thus becoming a legacy that is preserved, practiced and believed in until today.

The Lomban tradition in Jepara is a cultural ritual rich in symbolism and has a deep historical value for the local community. This ceremony is usually held in Syawal month after Eid al-Fitr, as a form of gratitude for the abundance of sustenance from the sea, as well as asking for safety in carrying out fishing activities. Lomban is not only a celebration, but also a place to strengthen social ties and emphasize the cultural identity of Jepara's coastal communities.

Along with the development of time, Lomban tradition has experienced various dynamics, both in the implementation and in the meaning contained in it. This research aims to examine the symbolism contained in various elements of the Lomban tradition, such as the procession of larung offerings, traditional dances, and other symbols used in the ceremony. Through the approach of cultural anthropology and semiotics, this research will reveal how these symbols represent the cultural values and beliefs of the people of Jepara.

Through this research, it is hoped to discover the hidden meanings behind the symbolism in the Lomban tradition, as well as how this cultural representation plays an important role in the social and spiritual life of the people of Jepara. Thus, this research not only provides theoretical insights, but also practical implications for the preservation of traditions and the strengthening of cultural identity in the midst of modernization.

## **METHOD**

This research uses an analytical descriptive approach with the support of qualitative data, direct observation, and literature analysis to examine symbolism and cultural representation in the Lomban tradition in Jepara. This method was chosen to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of various aspects of the Lomban tradition. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with traditional leaders, community leaders, Lomban tradition actors, and Jepara residents, focusing on their understanding of the symbolic meaning and cultural function of this tradition.

Direct observation was conducted using the participatory observation method, where researchers took part in Lomban tradition activities to understand the context and social dynamics, as well as non-participatory observation of elements such as the procession of larung offerings, traditional dances, and the use of certain symbols.

Literature analysis involved collecting and analyzing various relevant written sources, including books, journal articles, theses, dissertations and other documents that discuss the Lomban tradition, history, culture and symbolism in Jepara. The research procedure includes the preparation of research instruments, conducting interviews and observations, analyzing data using thematic analysis techniques, and preparing a research report. With this approach, the research is expected to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of symbolism and cultural representation in the Lomban tradition in Jepara and its contribution to the cultural identity of the local community.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **History of Lomban Tradition in Jepara**

Some sources say that the Lomban Party has been held for more than a hundred years. According to a journal entitled "The Value of Local Wisdom in the Lomban Tradition of the Jepara Community" by Dewi Puspita Ningsih from NU NTB University, the term Lomban by some Jepara people is believed to come from the word "lomba-lomba" which refers to the activities of the fishing community having fun by holding various seacompetitions, a tradition that is still carried out every Lomban Party. However, there are also those who argue that the word "lomban" comes from the word "lelumban" which means having fun. Pesta Lomban itself is a celebration of the fishermen community in Jepara Regency which is realized in the form of sea alms.

In a book entitled Folklore in Jepara, the origin of this lomban tradition is told. In the past, on the island of Kelor, which was considered a canal to Kartini beach, which at that time was still separate from mainland Jepara, lived a man known as Encik Lanang. The Dutch admired him for his great contribution in the Bali war, which earned him the honor of loaning the island of Panjang for his farm. Encik Lanang also had a close relationship with Ki Ronggo Mulyo, his friend who lived in Jepara Bay. During the reign of Adipati Citrosomo VII, two officials from Jepara set out for Karimunjawa but were caught in a sea storm after several days of sailing.

Luckily, Encik Lanang and Ki Ronggo Mulyo learned of the incident and gave help to the two officials, so they survived the terrible storm. As an expression of gratitude, they held offerings in the form of buffalo heads and puppet shows, authorized by Adipati Citrosomo VII, so that they would be protected

and fishermen would have abundant fish catches. This buffalo head larungan tradition was first performed seven days after Eid al-Fitr in 1330 H, after the two officials almost lost their lives at sea. The tradition, which was originally only practiced among fishermen, has now begun to be followed by the entire Jepara community.

### **Components of the Lomban Tradition**

Before the Lomban celebration, which is held during the day, there is a special event the night before, often called "Malam Tirakatan" or "Malam Selikuran". The event begins with a prayer meeting and recitation led by religious leaders or village elders, aimed at asking for blessings and safety for the community. Afterwards, a selamatan and kenduri are held, where the community gathers to eat together with traditional food that has been blessed. The Tirakatan night also includes a presentation of the history and philosophy behind the Lomban tradition by traditional leaders, as well as various art and cultural performances such as wayang kulit, traditional dances, gamelan music and drama. The preparation of offerings for the main ceremony is done with solemnity and sincerity. Some communities perform cleaning and purification rituals as spiritual preparation. In addition, gotong royong is done to prepare the ceremony venue, including setting up tents and arranging the offering area. The Tirakatan Night is a time of reflection, preparation and strengthening social bonds before the culmination of the Lomban tradition the next day.

Lomban tradition is also commonly called bada kupat because Jepara people serve ketupat or kupat (rice-based food wrapped in woven janur leaves or palm leaves) and lepet (sticky rice and coconut-based food wrapped in coconut leaves and formed into a cylinder) to celebrate. In addition to being eaten, kupat and lepet are also placed on the mirrors of vehicles or on the doors of houses in the hope of being safe wherever and whenever.

Kupat and lepet are among the many offerings required in the lomban tradition. But what is more attention-grabbing is the use of animal parts and organs for this tradition. The offerings consist of the head of a black goat (kendit) or buffalo head, as well as its legs, skin and innards wrapped in white mori cloth. Other offerings include a pair of ketupat and lepet, red and white porridge, market snacks, arang-arang kambong (fried rice), rice covered with fish, dekeman chicken (ingkung), and boreh/setaman flowers. All the offerings are placed in an ancak that has been prepared.

These offerings contain deep and rich philosophical meanings, reflecting various aspects of beliefs and cultural values in the traditions of Indonesian society.

- The head of a black goat (kendit) or buffalo head, as well as its feet, skin and innards wrapped in white mori cloth, symbolizes sacrifice and this offering is based on sincerity and sincerity to God.

the buffalo is cut and the meat is divided and cooked to be enjoyed together.

- A pair of ketupat and lepet. In Javanese philosophy it has several meanings. First, kupat means "ngaku lēpat" (admitting and apologizing for mistakes). Secondly, kupat can be interpreted as "laku papat" (four actions), which include: Lēbaran (after fasting), Lubēran (overflowing, giving zakat fitrah), Lēburan (washing away sins and mistakes), and Laburan (washing away or removing bad things as an act of maintaining physical and mental purity). In addition, some interpret kupat as "mēngku papat," which means unity, oneness, awareness, and mutual cooperation.
- Red and white porridge. In Javanese tradition, red and white porridge has a deep and symbolic meaning. The red color in the porridge symbolizes the female symbol, while the white color symbolizes the male symbol. The two are united in one container and interpreted to be a perfect human being. The way to put it in the takir cannot be wrong, it must be red porridge first and then topped with white porridge.
- Arang-arang kambong (fried rice or sticky rice) Described as a human being who is carried away by the current, floating everywhere, so it must be thrown so that the bad nature can be lost.
- Ayam dekeman (ingkung) symbolizes "enggala jungkung" or "enggala manēkung" which means to immediately prostrate and worship or dhikr completely to God. This position shows the attitude of human consciousness before his Lord with a humble body and sense of total submission.
- The boreh/setaman is an offering of white flowers, namely jasmine, white roses, and kanthil. Added with "boreh" which is a mixture of dlingo and bengle. Rose water can be added. The benefit of this boreh flower is to ward off bad luck. It is believed that the smell of the dlingo-bengle mixture is very disliked by evil spirits.

All these offerings are placed in an ancak, which symbolizes sincerity and earnestness in making offerings to the ancestors or gods. Each element in these offerings comes together in a ritual unity, reflecting the harmony between humans and nature and the Creator, as a form of gratitude, respect, and a request for blessings and protection. The Lomban event begins with an opening prayer led by religious leaders or traditional elders, aiming to ask for safety, blessing, and smooth running of the event. After that, the offerings that have been prepared are paraded in a procession to the main location such as the beach or other sacred places, accompanied by music, dances, and traditional chants. At the ceremony site, the ceremony leader delivers prayers as a form of respect and requests for blessings to the ancestral spirits or gods believed to protect the area. The highlight of the Lomban event is the execution of larung sesaji, where offerings are thrown into the sea or a sacred water source as a symbol of wishing for safety and prosperity. After the

main ceremony, art and cultural performances are often held to celebrate local cultural heritage and history. The Lomban event closes with a closing prayer and thanksgiving, marking the completion of a celebration full of spiritual and cultural significance for the local community

Figure 1. offerings provided for the lomban tradition



Source: [Uncovering the Mystery of Offerings in Jepara's Lomban Tradition - SuaraBaru.id](https://www.suarabaru.id)

Figure 2. People scramble after the offerings are thrown.

Source: <https://cdn.antarafoto.com/cache/1200x794/2022/05/09/tradisi-pesta-lomban-di-jepara-zptl-dom.jpg>

### Values and Impacts of Lomban Jepara Tradition

The Lomban tradition in Jepara has a deep philosophical meaning, reflecting the close relationship between humans and nature, spirituality, and the social life of the community. This tradition is not only a traditional ceremony, but also contains deep values in the cultural and religious context of the Jepara people. Lomban reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. In this tradition, larung offerings to the sea or holy water sources are not only a form of respect for ancestors or guardian gods, but also as an expression of gratitude to nature.

which provides a source of sustenance and life. The act of larung offerings reflects an awareness of the importance of maintaining the balance of the marine ecosystem and maintaining the sustainability of natural resources. Lomban as a religious ritual also shows the depth of spirituality of the people of Jepara. Prayer ceremonies, respect for ancestors, and the use of offerings as a medium of communication with the

supernatural realm show a strong belief in the existence and role of spirits or spiritual entities in daily life.

The Lomban tradition in Jepara has significant impacts, covering social, economic, cultural and religious aspects. Positively, this tradition strengthens the sense of unity and togetherness among the people of Jepara, demonstrating an awareness of the importance of living in harmony and solidarity. In addition, Lomban also contributes to creating new business opportunities for local residents, resulting in an increase in their economic income. Culturally, the Lomban tradition plays an important role in preserving Jepara's local wisdom, reminding people of the traditional cultural values that need to be preserved and maintained. One interesting aspect is that although it is not an Islamic tradition, the implementation of Lomban still maintains religious principles that are free from shirk (polytheism), so that it can be widely accepted by people with diverse religious backgrounds. Thus, the Lomban tradition is not only a valuable cultural heritage, but also plays a role in enriching and strengthening the identity and social life of the people of Jepara as a whole.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research on Lomban tradition in Jepara, it can be concluded that this tradition has a deep philosophical value as well as various significant impacts for the local community. Philosophically, Lomban reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, strong spirituality, and rich cultural diversity in Indonesia. This tradition is not only a form of gratitude for sustenance from the sea and a wish for safety, but also a vehicle to strengthen social solidarity and reinforce cultural identity.

In terms of impact, Lomban contributes positively in strengthening the unity and togetherness of Jepara people, as well as creating new economic opportunities through trade and tourism activities. Culturally, Lomban plays an important role in preserving local wisdom and enriching Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage. In addition, the practice of Lomban also shows tolerance in a religious context, because although it is not an Islamic tradition, Lomban is still carried out with religious principles that are free from shirk.

This research provides an in-depth understanding of the symbolic and cultural values in the Lomban tradition, as well as its relevance in the social and spiritual context of Jepara society. The practical implication of this research is the importance of preserving cultural traditions as part of national identity and as a valuable source of local wisdom. It is hoped that this research can serve as a basis for further preservation measures and increase appreciation of traditional cultural values in Indonesia.

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