

## THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE MUNGGAHAN RAMADHAN RITUAL IN BANDUNG, WEST JAVA

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### **Abstract**

*Rituals are sacred religious teachings based on beliefs that will give birth to peace and blessings in the life of the believers. One of them is the Munggahan ritual which is still carried out by the people of Bandung, West Java. This study aimed to determine how the ritual process was carried out and to understand the theological meaning of the Munggahan ritual carried out by the people of Bandung. The design used in this research is descriptive method that systematically explains the facts in the field through the anthropological approach of religion. The data collection process employed observation and interview. The informants were the chairman and several members of the Bandung community. The result shows that the theological meaning of the Munggahan ritual in the month of Ramadan is a form of cleansing oneself from bad things during the past year as well as a form of expression of gratitude for what Allah has given. It also conveys the hope to be given the convenience, safety, health and to avoid bad deeds during worship during Ramadan.*

*Ritual merupakan ajaran agama yang sakral berdasarkan kepercayaan yang akan melahirkan kedamaian dan keberkahan dalam hidup penganutnya. Salah satunya adalah ritual Munggahan yang masih dilakukan oleh masyarakat*

Bandung, Jawa Barat. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana proses ritual itu dilakukan dan untuk memahami makna teologis dari ritual Munggahan yang dilakukan oleh masyarakat Bandung. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode deskriptif yang menjelaskan secara sistematis fakta-fakta di lapangan melalui pendekatan antropologi agama. Proses pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi dan wawancara. Informan adalah ketua dan beberapa anggota masyarakat Bandung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna teologis dari ritual Munggahan di bulan Ramadhan adalah sebagai bentuk pembersihan diri dari hal-hal buruk selama satu tahun terakhir sekaligus sebagai bentuk ungkapan rasa syukur atas apa yang telah diberikan oleh Allah SWT. Juga menyampaikan harapan agar diberikan kemudahan, keselamatan, kesehatan dan terhindar dari perbuatan buruk selama beribadah di bulan Ramadhan.

**Keywords:** *Theological meaning; Munggahan ritual; Ramadhan*

## Introduction

Religious community groups recognize religious rituals. These rituals have different forms, purposes, and goals between one community and another. Ritual is sacred religious teaching based on the beliefs that will give birth to peace of heart and blessings in life (Djamari, 1993). Rituals are carried out in accordance with specific provisions that are different from everyday behavior. It also can be defined as strictly regulated behavior carried out continuously and eventually becoming a tradition. The value of a tradition is a concept that is in the minds of certain people about what they consider valuable, so that it becomes a guide and gives direction to their lives (Muliadi & Komarudin, 2020).

Human behavior that is often repeated, can be used as a habit or custom. *Adat* or cultural values can also be interpreted as personal habits that the community accepts and practices through tradition. In Indonesia, various regions have various traditions, for instance welcoming the holy month of Ramadhan. They celebrate the arrival of this holy month by gathering with relatives or friends. It is a part of worship as a manifestation of human adherence to God as the creator. Worship is not just an activity or ritual carried out without meaning. It is also a form of human gratitude to Allah SWT for all the blessings given (Komarudin, 2019).

The tradition of welcoming Ramadhan is called *dugderan* in Semarang. This tradition originates from the city of Semarang, Central Java. The name

dugderan itself comes from the words Dug and Der. The word Dug is taken from the sound of the mosque drum that repeatedly beats as a sign of the arrival of the beginning of the month of Ramadan. Meanwhile, the word Der comes from the sound of the cannon boom igniting along with the drum beats. This tradition that has been hundreds of years old continues to survive amid the times. Held approximately 1-2 weeks before the fast begins (Sholehuddin et al., 2021).

The dugderan tradition has been going on for a long time. This tradition has become a kind of folk party for residents of Semarang and its surroundings. It has become a folk party in the form of Japin dance, parade (carnival), and the drum beat by the Mayor of Semarang announcing the beginning of fasting month (Cahyono et al., 2019). To maintain the atmosphere like in its day, the cannons' booming is usually replaced with the sounds of firecrackers or *bleduran*. *Bleduran* is made of a tree trunk with a hole in the middle, to produce a sound like a cannon, usually given carbide which then ignites a fire.

This tradition is called *padusan* in Java. People in Klaten, Boyolali, Salatiga, Yogyakarta and Pati used to perform ceremonies for bathing in wells or springs at religious places. The term *padusan* is from the word *Adus* which means a bath, so that the body and soul of a person who is going to fast is clean physically and mentally. In Pati, *padusan* is usually done at Sendang Sani spring (it is said to be a legacy of Sunan Muria). It also means cleansing oneself of all mistakes and sins that have been done and get ready to welcome the benefits of the fasting (Harianti, 2022).

A similar tradition is called *wuwungan* in Tegal. It means cleaning yourself by washing your hair, which is a unique tradition carried out by the community in the river dam of the village of Danawarih, Natab Balapulang two days before Ramadan month. What makes it different from other regional traditions is that people bring items of worship facilities at the mosque. They clean the carpets, mats and other items from the mosque. With this purification, they hope to carry out fasting with a clean and sincere heart (Azisi & Yusuf, 2021).

In Banyumas, this tradition is named *perlon unggahan*. Every time before the fasting month, the people of Banyumas hold this tradition as a big meal festival. Various kinds of food are served in this event, but the mandatory menu is packaged rice, *serundeng* beef as a side dish, and traditional salad. At least twelve men lifted the meal in the parade because of the large number of cows and goats slaughtered. This big festival represents the great support for building or strengthening faith in religious harmony (Rachmadhani, 2015).

People in Aceh have a similar tradition called Meugang. However, unlike the others, people in Nangroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) welcome the holy month of Ramadan by slaughtering a goat or buffalo. This tradition, called Meugang existed since 1400 AD, or since the time of the kings of Aceh. All Acehnese commonly practices the tradition of eating buffalo or goat meat. Even if residents cannot afford meat to eat, all residents will work together to help, so that all residents can enjoy mutton or buffalo meat before Ramadan (Nuridin 2016). The Meugang tradition is usually carried out during Lebaran and Hajj holidays. Until today Acehnese believe that maintaining this tradition will be able to keep them away from disasters and calamities (Desfandi et al., 2021).

Balimau in West Sumatra is a tradition to welcome Ramadhan. The balimau tradition is almost the same as the padusan tradition, which is to clean yourself by soaking or bathing together in the river or bathing place using limes. The balimau tradition is carried out by the people of Padang, West Sumatra (Mubarok, 2019). Usually, this tradition is carried out from sunrise to sunset a few days before the month of Ramadan. Similar to padusan, the meaning of this balimau tradition means cleaning oneself physically and mentally, so that someone is ready to carry out fasting.

Apart from balimau, the people of West Sumatra also have a tradition called malamang, which is to make lemang from glutinous rice put in bamboo. This tradition is carried out two days before Ramadan month. Lemang that is already cooked, will later be delivered to the house of the closest relative as a symbol of apologizing before the fasting (Yusutria, 2022).

Meanwhile in West Java, there is a tradition called the Munggahan. It is an activity of gathering with family members and relatives, and apologizing to each other while enjoying special food offerings to prepare for Ramadan. This tradition is a custom carried out by Sundanese people generally and has been maintained for generations. Munggahan means an increase in determination or expecting to improve the quality of life and the month of Ramadan is a means to improve the quality of life and faith. Munggahan benefits and meanings include strengthening good relations with family, friends, friends, relatives, relatives and even with your own neighbors. Besides staying in touch, we can also forgive each other so that we have a clean heart to start fasting. Besides that, it is also a form of gratitude to Allah SWT (Rohmah, 2014).

From some of the phenomena and traditions as described in several previous studies above, it can be inferred that the tradition is directly related to the implementation of Ramadan worship itself or not at all. Hence, it has

become people's habit and lifestyle to welcome the holy month of Ramadan. As in Tatar Sunda, West Java, almost every region, village, and city does not pass this moment. Each region has uniqueness and diversity in welcoming the holy month of Ramadan. Therefore, this research was intended to get some scientific explanations regarding the following matters: to understand the process of getting a clear description of how the Munggahan ritual is carried out by the people of Bandung, West Java. Furthermore, it aimed to discover the meaning of the Munggahan ritual for the people of Bandung, West Java which needs more explorative findings on its theological meaning in particular.

## **Method**

The design used in this research is descriptive method that systematically explains the facts concerning Munggahan tradition in Bandung through the anthropological approach of religion. The data collection process employed observation and interview. The informants were the chairman and several members of the Bandung community. The observation is to gain the information on any aspects related to the ritual of Munggahan conducted before the month of Ramadan. The interview is used to confirm the observation result and complete the data on the theological meaning of the tradition. The analysis was directed to identify the research results on the theological significance of the observed tradition elaborated in the discussion based on the research framework. In the final stage of this study, the researcher concluded the answer of the research problems.

## **Result & Discussion**

### **History of Bandung**

Before the Bandung District was established, the Bandung area was known as the Tatar Ukur, a part of the Timbanganten kingdom area with the capital of Tegalluar. It was also based under the dominance of the Sunda-Pajajaran kingdom. Since the middle of the 15th century, the kingdom of Timbanganten was ruled for generations by Prabu Pandaan Ukur, Dipati Agung and Dipati Ukur. During Dipati Ukur's reign, Tatar Ukur was a reasonably large area, covering most of West Java, consisting of nine regions called the Sasanga Ukur (Lubis, 2000). After the Sunda-Pajajaran kingdom collapsed (1579/1580) due to the Banten troop movement to spread Islam in the West Java region, the Tatar Ukur became the territory of the Sumedanglarang kingdom, the successor

to the Pajajaran kingdom. The kingdom of Sumedang was banned and first ruled by Prabu Geusan Ulun in (1579/1608), with its capital at Kutamaya, a place located west of the present-day city of Sumedang (Lubis, 2000).

According to the history of Sumedang (babad), Dipati Ukur was captured on Mount Lumbung (Bandung area) in 1632 because of his rebellion (Hakim, 2015). After the Dipati Ukur rebellion was considered over, Sultan Agung handed back the position of Regent of Wedana Priangan to Prince Dipati Rangga Gede to stabilize the situation and condition of the area. As a result, the Priangan area outside Sumedang and Galuh is divided into three districts, namely Bandung Regency, Parakanmuncang Regency and Sukapura Regency, by appointing three regional heads from Priangan. They are considered to have been instrumental in quelling the Dipati Ukur rebellion (Juariah, 2016).

The three regional heads referred to were Ki Astamanggala, Umbul Cihaurbeuti was appointed regent of the regent (regent) of Bandung with the title Tumenggung Wiraangunangun, Tanubaya as regent of Parakanmuncang and Ngabehi Wirawangsa became regent of Sukapura with the title Tumenggung Wiradadaha. The three men were appointed simultaneously based on the Sultan Agung Charter, which was issued on Saturday, the 9th of Muharam Alip Year (Javanese calendar). Thus, the date was not only the anniversary of Bandung Regency but also the anniversary of Sukapura Regency and Regency Parakanmuncang (Lubis, 2000).

The establishment of Bandung Regency, means that in the Bandung area there were changes, especially in the field of government. The area that was initially a subordinate part of the royal government of the Sunda-Pajajaran Kingdom then Sumedanglarang with unclear status, turned into an area with a clear administrative status, namely the Regency. After the three regents were appointed at the center of the Mataram government, they returned to their respective regions. Bandung's history states that the Bandung Regent Tumeggung Wiraangunangun and his followers from Mataram returned to Tatar Ukur (Juariah, 2016). The first time they came to Timbanganten. There the Bandung regent received 200 counts. Furthermore, Tumenggung Wiraangunangun, together with his people built Krapyak, a place located on the edge of Sungat Citarum near the mouth of the Cikapundung River, (a suburb of the southern part of Bandung Regency) as the Regency capital. The central area of Bandung Regency, Krapyak and the surrounding area is called Bumi Tatar Ukur Gede (Lubis, 2000).

The administrative area of Bandung Regency under the influence of Mataram until the end of the 17th century, is not yet known with certainty because accurate sources containing data about it were not / have not been found. However, according to indigenous sources, the early-stage area of the Bandung Regency as the Tatar Ukur, includes the Timbanganten, Kahuripan, Sagaraherang, and parts of Tanah Medang. The Priangan area outside the Sumedang, Parakanmuncang, Sukapura and Galuh regencies, which was originally the Tatar Ukur (Ukur Sasanga) during the Dipati Ukur administration, was the administrative region of Bandung Regency at that time. Gandasoli, Adiarsa, Cabangbungin, Banjaran, Cipeujeuh, Majalaya, Cisondari, Cavity, Kopo, Ujungberung and others, including the Kuripan, Sagaraherang and Tanahmedang areas (Lubis, 2000).

For the history of the village of Cipinang, there was no written data about the initial establishment of the village. It can only be traced based on speech or oral traditions circulating in Cipinang village community. In the past Cipinang village was still in the form of *leuweung* or forest. Then some residents from the Cipinang Cimaung area, Pangalengan District came to the forest and settled there by planting areca trees around their dwellings. That was where the name of the village of Cipinang came from (Interview with Dadi Permana, Secretary of Local Neighborhood, 2021).

### **The Implementation of the Mungghahan Ritual**

Mungghahan rituals are usually performed the day before the fast of Ramadan, namely on the 30th of Sha'ban month. Preparations made include eight practices. First, cleaning the house and yard. Second, preparing the dishes that will be eaten at dawn. The dishes prepared include *opor* or chicken curry and vegetables as complementary. This dish is cooked in large portions, so that it can be shared with the closest neighbors. Third, visiting the grave of the parents and deceased relatives. The goal is to pray for them and remind themselves of death. Fourth, bathing or self-purifying to welcome the month of Ramadan in a clean body and soul. Fifth, having Tarawih prayer. It can be done at home or at the nearest mosque. Sixth, the ritual of steaming. That is the ritual of sending prayers to ancestors. This ritual is performed at around 2 a.m. Seventh, having *sahur* with all family members. Even families who are far away going home first for the sake of gathering and having *sahur* together. Eighth, having mutual forgiveness between family members, starting from

children to parents. The goal is to be free from sins committed during the past year (Interview with Nandi Sopandi, 2021).

One of the practices in Munggahan ritual namely steaming or *ngukus* is done with some simple tools required including: a bucket for burning incense (*parukuyan*), *sasajen* or offering, consisting of drinks such as *ci kopi pait* (bitter coffee water), *ci kopi amis* (sweet coffee water), *pait teh* (bitter tea), *amis teh* (sweet tea), and *ci herang* (plain water). The food consists of rice, soup, sauteed chicken, sauteed potatoes, fruits, sponge cake, bread, cigarettes, *seureuh* and *apu* (chew whitting). It also needs the clothes of the deceased, and tuberoses flowers

The *ngukus* ritual is carried out in the early morning at around 2 a.m. After the ritual needs are ready and all family members present, the ritual begins with the recitation of the prayer. Do'a was led by the head of the family. The prayer is a request for forgiveness to Allah for the deceased or what is commonly referred to as sending "gift" *ngahadiahan* (Interview with Nandi Sopandi, 2021). It is as a form of filial piety towards parents who have died and requests for safety and health during the fasting of Ramadan. After that, it was followed by a meal together or *sahur*. Then it ends with mutual forgiveness between family members.

### The Meaning of the Munggahan Tradition

Munggahan tradition comes from the word *unggah* which means to go up. It implies that this tradition is expected to raise the level of humans in facing the month of fasting, both physically and mentally. This tradition has been going on since ancient times as an expression of gratitude to Allah with the coming of the Ramadan month. In other areas, the Munggahan takes place a day or two before Ramadan arrives, but in West Java this tradition usually takes place on the night of the first day of Ramadan.

This tradition is carried out in almost all areas in West Java, but what is unique is that each region carries out this tradition differently. For instance, the people in North Labuhanbatu, carried out this tradition by holding a meal with all residents in the village. All of them will bring food and gather at the mosque in the village. Then, after that, the community will sit together as momentum to strengthen the ties of friendship, forgive each other and cleanse the hearts of neighbors and others. However, people in Batubara do different things. They conducted Munggahan by slaughtering buffalo or cow, starting thirty-two days before the first day of Ramadan.



The Munggahan tradition is still preserved and maintained by the people of Bandung, West Java. Apart from respecting existing traditions, this tradition also has good values in life, especially in social life. This tradition is used as a momentum for the community to strengthen unity among others. In this case, residents come together, greet each other, and stay in touch. In addition, this tradition also celebrates the harmony of citizens in the society.

Another meaning of Munggahan tradition is as a means to pray for parents who have died. Usually, people will recite prayers such as tahlil and read Surah Yasin. Chanting these prayers as a means of worship to Allah brings peace of mind and praying for the ancestral spirits, so Allah places them in a noble place.

The ultimate meaning that can be taken from all the rituals that have been carried out in the process of changing one's attitude from being less good to becoming a better person in terms of thoughts, worship, behavior and other habits. The Ramadhan is a very significant month, which is the month of testing. Whoever passes all these tests, then that person has reached the degree of Munggahan (go to the holy level) (Interview with H. E. Mulyana, 2021).

### **Islam and Munggahan Rituals**

Before embracing Islam, the religion of the early Sundanese was the Wiwitan or Jatisunda Sundanese religion (Komarudin, 2017). They believe in the existence of three universes controlled by Sanghiang Keres a (Almighty) Sanghiang Keres a/Batara Tunggal, Batara Jagat (ruler of nature) and Batara Seda Niskala (the unseen). The three universes are Buana Nyungcung where sanghiang keres a lives, Buana Panca where humans and other creatures live, and Buana Larang (the hell). The basis of belief in a single substance found in the religion of origin of the Sundanese makes it easier for them to accept the Islamic religion that came later.

Munggahan is a tradition of the Sundanese Muslim Community to welcome the month of Ramadan, which is held at the end of the month of Sha'ban (one or two days before the month of Ramadan). The form of implementation varies, generally gathering with family and relatives, eating together, forgiving each other, and praying together. In addition, some visit tourist attractions with their family, make pilgrimages to the graves of their parents or pious people, or practice almsgiving (alms on the day before the fasting month) (Yusuf & Toet, 2012). It also means to rise to a holy month or high degree (Rohmah, 2014). This tradition is intended as an expression

of gratitude to Allah, to cleanse oneself from lousy thing during the previous year and to avoid evil deeds during fasting in the month of Ramadhan.

Islam does not explicitly require the implementation of Munggahan rituals, but these rituals have emerged and developed since the time of their previous ancestors, which eventually became an annual tradition. Like the ritual of bathing before the coming month of Ramadan, bathing is only intended to cleanse oneself (Azisi & Yusuf, 2021). Although, self-purifying can be interpreted as cleansing the physical that is outward, it can also be interpreted as cleansing oneself at the mental or spiritual level, which is inwardly (Rahman, 2015). However, the society, in general, takes the first meaning, namely cleaning physically. Therefore, the people's interpretation of the recommendation is applied by bathing. Then the bathing that is done is not just bathing, but in the ritual of bathing there is acculturation because bathing is done not just as usual, but taking a bath to clean oneself. More importantly, bathing is done solemnly in certain places, such as on the slopes of mountains, rivers, beaches, etc.

### **The Value System Contained in the Rituals for Welcoming Ramadan**

Humans are cultural creatures and have symbols (Herusantoso, 2001). The symbol is reflected in the attitudes of the community, then forms a value system contained in the customs of a particular culture including the Munggahan ritual. According to Muslims in general and Sundanese in particular, the month of fasting is a month full of blessings and has its own privileges because it is in line with the Sundanese philosophy that Munggahan is a "*pagawean nincak ti handap ka nu leuwih sublime, naek ka place nu leuwih noble*", [the work goes from the bottom to the higher, up to the highest]. Ramadan is a month used as training for people to change their mindset, behavior, and habits for the betterment in the future.

Despite the people's tenet on tradition, several factors influence the shifting of cultural values in a society. Yolanda and Fatmariza (2019) mention that the intercultural interactions in the globalization process are currently sweeping the world due to the intercultural interactions in the globalization process. It is not only at the inter-cultural level in the archipelago. It also reaches inter-cultures outside the existing cultures in the country. This factor is very influential in the shift in the values of a culture because in this cross-cultural movement, there are various inter-cultural meetings (cultural counters). It simultaneously creates a process of inter-cultural interplay, with the

possibility that one party has a greater influence than the other. Another factor contributing to the shift of culture is the existence of printed and electronic media that nowadays are more accessible anywhere and anytime. Such easy access makes people's insights broader. Thus it might influence the view of life of the community. Suppose the view of life of a society changed. In that case, automatically, there will be a shift in the cultural value system, including the customary values contained in the rituals carried out by the community.

The level of education in society affects the mindset of the community. Higher education forms a society that thinks more realistically, but ignores local traditions in carrying out the customs that have been practiced since their ancestors. Then they criticize superstitious dogmas within the rituals rooted in society. However, the community keeps the ritual as its own meaningful local wisdom (Abdullah et al., 2008). Another possibility is the implementation of rituals with shallow appreciation due to the above influences, so that here lies the deterioration of the value system of a culture.

### **Shifting of Values in Munggahan Rituals**

The shift of values contained in Munggahan can be viewed from two groups of society based on their age. The first group aged around 35 - 40 and above, while the second group is younger involving children and adolescents. In the elderly group, they have performed padusan every year, from childhood and in general, they have really understood and lived the values hidden behind the rituals of Munggahan. However, it needs to be highlighted that not all of the elderly understand this tradition, its purpose, and the local wisdom in the tradition. In fact, many of them have left this ritual. In contrast, the younger group viewed that the traditional values of Munggahan have faded as it belongs to ancestral rituals.

As mentioned above, several factors influence the causes why this happens. Similarly, in the Munggahan ritual carried out by the Cipinang village community, almost all of them carry out the ritual of Munggahan, but some rituals have started to fade and have been abandoned. Among them are the practices of sending food. Many people have abandoned this tradition because everyone must have the same food for Munggahan. Cooked food is no longer specialized. Another tradition which is not anymore practiced at large is bathing. This activity is no longer done together at the same place and time. The community prefers to do it in their respective homes. Beside bathing, *nyekar* or visiting grave is also rarely done. Most people have not practiced this

tradition due to changes in thought patterns and religious influences. The Munggahan ritual namely steaming currently has been largely abandoned. They do not go to the place where the offerings are made, and not anymore use the tools for this ritual. One of the factors is the economic factor. Yet, the residents of Cipinang village who still perform the *ngukus* ritual are Mr. Nandi Sopandi's family. He still continues to maintain this ritual to preserve the traditions of his ancestors. With this change, it does not completely change all the meaning and aspects of the ritual contained in the implementation of the Munggahan ritual.

### Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion and research that has been done, the following conclusions are obtained. *First*, the Munggahan ritual is usually carried out the day before the fast of Ramadan, namely on the 30th of Sha'ban. The *ngukus* ritual is carried out in the early morning at around 2 a.m., which begins with reciting the Do'a led by the head of the family. The prayer is a request for forgiveness to Allah for their families who have died. It is a form of child service to parents who have died as well as requests for safety and health during the fasting of Ramadan. After that, it was followed by having *sahur* together. Then it ends with mutual forgiveness between family members.

The meaning that can be taken from the implementation of this Mungghan ritual is all forms of change both in terms of thought patterns, behavior, habits that were initially bad to become better and reach the degree of *unggah* (holy, clean). In addition to individual changes, the wisdom of this month of Ramadan is to improve relationships with fellow citizens.

The finding of this study implies some suggestions for the future generations of Cipinang villagers to maintain Munggahan ritual as one of the cultural assets that must be preserved. The government of Gandasari Village, especially Cipinang Village and the Bandung Regency Culture and Tourism Office should pay more attention to protect, facilitate and help preserving the Munggahan ritual. Finally, the results of this study are expected to be a recommendation for further research related to religious rituals and local religious wisdom.

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