

The Dual Role of the 'Haji' Title: Negotiating Spiritual Identity and Social Stratification in the Sasak Community of Kayangan, North Lombok

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Sub. 17th, Mar. 2025


Rev. 17th, May. 2025

Publ. 20th, Jun. 2025

Abstract

This study explores the dual role of the honorific title “Haji” in the Sasak community of Kayangan, North Lombok, as both a marker of spiritual identity and an indicator of social stratification. While the Hajj pilgrimage is a fundamental obligation in Islam, the title “Haji” has evolved beyond its religious origins to symbolize prestige, authority, and social capital, often accessible mainly to individuals with substantial economic resources. Historically, the practice of Hajj labelling emerged in 17th-century Banten, was reinforced during the Dutch colonial period, and subsequently spread across Southeast Asia. Within the Sasak socio-cultural framework, the title functions not only as recognition of religious devotion but also as a strategic tool for shaping personal and collective identity, reinforcing hierarchical structures, and legitimizing political authority. For some community members, the decision to perform the pilgrimage is influenced not solely by spiritual aspirations but also by the pursuit of higher social standing and influence. This dual role generates a tension between maintaining the spiritual purity of the pilgrimage and accommodating its transformation into a socio-political instrument. The findings underscore the importance of critical reflection on how religious symbols are negotiated in everyday life when intertwined with economic capacity, prestige, and power relations in contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: Hajj labelling, social recognition, social stratification, spirituality, prestige

 Vol. 1, No. 01, 2025
10.20414/tabéq.v2i2-



How to Cite :

Ramdani, A. D. (2025). The Dual Role of the 'Haji' Title: Negotiating Spiritual Identity and Social Stratification in the Sasak Community of Kayangan, North Lombok. NUSANTARA: Journal of Religion and Civilization, 1(1), 17-29. Doi

A. INTRODUCTION

Hajj, as one of the pillars of Islam, has a profound spiritual dimension but in Indonesia, it is not uncommon for Hajj to be seen as a symbol of social status. Mandatory for every Muslim who is physically, mentally, and financially capable, Hajj is a sign that one has fulfilled Allah's call and has a vocation as a 'guard guest' in Makkah (Muawanah & Mustolehudin, 2020). The ability to perform Hajj, especially in terms of cost and spiritual readiness, is accompanied by increased social status: individuals who have performed Hajj often receive awards, honorary titles, and special treatment in social interactions (Zainuddin, 2013; Hidayati, 2024).

The title "Haji" (for men) or "Hajjah" (for women) affixed to the front of one's name serves not only as a spiritual marker, but also as an indicator of prestige and social legitimacy within the community. This title is commonly used as a special honour in many rural areas-encouraging individuals who have gone on hajj to be considered role models and individuals who are closer to religious values and God (Khan & Rahman, 2020; Pratama, 2023). As symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the title of Hajj allows individuals more access to social, religious and cultural spheres-a means of status reification and community recognition.

However, for most Muslims who are not in the upper economic strata, access to the Hajj is often limited, as performing it requires substantial financial resources and laborious administrative procedures. This creates a social divide: the title of Hajj signifies not only piety and spiritual pursuit, but also class stratification-where only those with sufficient resources are able to achieve it (Widyadhana, 2024). In Lombok, the context of the Sasak Tribe reflects a society that still maintains strong traditions while feeling economic pressures; the Hajj title becomes dual - a religious identity and a symbolic stratification tool.

This article explores the dual function of the Hajj title in the Sasak community in Kayangan, North Lombok: 1) as an affirmation of religious identity and 2) as an instrument of social stratification. In-depth studies in rural settings show that the application of this title is not only a religious symbol, but also a structural aspect of social relations - with individuals with the title of haji tending to be treated with more respect, trusted to lead religious events, and given symbolic "honourable" roles (Rasyad, 2017; Rahmawati, 2022).

The use of the title Hajj can create an implicit social boundary ("status closure") that separates those who are "already" and those who are "not yet" in the social structure, including within the internal community. Even in cultural adaptations, rituals, and social containers, Hajj becomes a symbolic identity as social capital. Weber emphasises the importance of status groups in organising social stratification based on group membership which is seen as legitimising shared values (Weber, 1978).

Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory complements this analysis: Hajj degrees not only deliver status, but also foster social capital-networks, moral legitimacy, and access to honour structures-that collectively strengthen individuals' position in the community (Bourdieu, 1986). This reinforcement has the potential to strengthen social cohesion, but it also creates ambivalence: some individuals feel morally elevated, but many are then burdened by the high expectations of the community to be religious role models.

The Sasak context in Kayangan is distinctive: the community values the hajj as a spiritual pinnacle and a sign of piety. However, patriarchal hierarchical culture and economic factors complicate interpretations; there is an implicit expectation that those who have made the hajj are moral leaders, while also being expected to display a more stable religious and economic lifestyle. In relatively closed societies, such symbols have more power than in urban settings-highlighting the importance of symbolic mobility and identity representation at the village level (Famelia, 2023).

This article uses a qualitative approach-ethnography, in-depth interviews, and observations-to explore the community's perception of the title Hajj and its social implications. The research focus refers to identifying: 1) how the title of Hajj reinforces personal and collective religious identity; 2) how the social status of individuals with the title of Hajj is maintained, negotiated, or contested in social space; and 3) how the title shapes social relations and solidarity in Sasak society.

In the modern era, where religious populism and the global economy are on the rise, this analysis becomes relevant: religious titles can be positioned as the intersection of spirituality and stratification; on the one hand strengthening cultural cohesion, on the other producing symbolic social inequality. Such studies are important for understanding how religious value is structurally articulated in

traditional Indonesian society and how it shapes narratives of identity, social mobility and symbolic justice.

B. METHODS

This research employs a descriptive, qualitative approach with an ethnographic design, which enables researchers to gain a deep understanding of the social practices and symbolic meanings associated with the title "Haji" in the Sasak community of Salut Village, Kayangan, North Lombok. The research location was chosen because the community still maintains a strong tradition of using the titles "Haji or Hajjah" as both a religious marker and a social status. The selection of informants was conducted through purposive sampling, involving a variety of relevant actors, including individuals who have performed Hajj, religious leaders (ustaz and kyai), community leaders, and residents who have not yet performed Hajj. This strategy aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dual role of the title "Haji" in shaping both spiritual identity and social stratification.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques. Firstly, in-depth interviews were used to explore informants' personal experiences, motivations, and perceptions of the meaning of the Hajj title. Secondly, participatory observation was applied in various social and religious activities, such as recitation, village meetings, and religious celebrations, to understand how the title is practised in daily life. Thirdly, documentation of village archives and local historical records was utilized to trace the historical development of Hajj labelling practices in the region. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, through the stages of data reduction, thematic organisation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was guided by Bourdieu's social-symbolic capital theoretical framework, which enables an exploration of how the title of Hajj functions as symbolic capital to gain legitimacy, prestige, and social authority. To ensure validity and credibility, this study employs triangulation of methods and sources by comparing data from various collection techniques and across different categories of informants. This strategy is effective in strengthening the reliability of qualitative research findings (Patton, 1999; Bhandari, 2023).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Spiritual Aspects: Strengthening Religious Identity

In the religious landscape of the Sasak community in Kayangan, the title "Haji" holds a strong symbolic position, serving as a reinforcement of Islamic identity. Theologically, Hajj is understood as the ultimate act of worship that synergises the physical, financial, and spiritual dimensions. In the realm of praxis, the Hajj experience presents moments of transformation: mobilizing the intention (*qashd*), emptying oneself of worldly attributes when wearing *ihram*, and engaging in core rituals such as *tawaf*, *sa'i*, *wuqf* in Arafat, staying in Muzdalifah and Mina, and stoning the *jumrah*. For informants in Kayangan, this series is not just a fulfilment of obligations, but a "rite of passage" that marks the rebirth of religious identity - from a "worshipper" to "al-Hajj or al-Hajjah" who carries the burden of new meaning in socio-religious life.

The transformation process is evident in changes in worship patterns, lifestyle, and value orientation. A number of informants acknowledged the increased discipline of praying in congregation, attendance at *taklim* assemblies, activeness in *yasinan* and *dhikr* activities, and a firmer commitment to *muamalah* ethics (honesty in trade, neighbourly manners, willingness to mediate conflicts). They describe the *wuqf* experience as the "pinnacle of contemplation" - a space of silence that reinforces the realisation of one's own mortality and the sovereignty of God. For others, the momentum of *tawaf*-moving in unison around the Kaaba-becomes a metaphor for individual connectedness to the community of *ummah* that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. These narratives consolidate the meaning that Hajj reaffirms *fitrah*, sharpens piety, and encourages the practice of *ihsan* in daily life.

In Kayangan, the institutionalisation of this spiritual meaning can be seen in the way the community positions the holder of the title "Haji". At village recitals, *Hajjis*/*Hajjahs* are often asked to open the event with a prayer, share their testimony of a religious experience, or offer moral lessons from the pilgrimage. During *takziah*, they often lead *tahlil*; during the celebration of Islamic holidays, they are frequently asked to provide a source of religious experiences. These practices affirm the title "Haji" as a source of religious legitimacy, presenting an "authority of piety" that the community borrows to strengthen its religious *habitus*. For the younger generation,

the figure of Haji/Hajjah becomes a reference, not because of formal authority, but because of "exemplary authority": wearing more modest clothes, speaking in a soothing manner, and consistently being present in collective work.

However, behind the strengthening of identity lies an inner dialectic that is not simple. A number of Hajjis stated that they felt a "moral burden" after the trip, as the community's expectation was that they would be more pious, refrain from harsh speech, be more generous, and consistently participate in religious activities. This expectation shows two responses. First, an affirmative response-the title pumps up energy to improve themselves, build good habits, and extend social benefits. Second, a defensive response-a sense of surveillance that leads some to distance themselves from public spaces to avoid judgment. Both demonstrate that the title "Hajj" is a living symbol, constantly negotiated between a desire for spiritual consistency and the increasing social demands.

At the family level, Hajj also repositions role relations. Hajj parents recounted an increase in the authority of advice in their children's upbringing: calls to pray on time, the regularity of reciting the Quran, and controlling behavior gained new legitimacy after they had "completed the peak of the pillars of Islam." This phenomenon reflects a more effective value transmission mechanism that rests on community-recognised spiritual credentials. At the same time, married couples often experience an increased emotional closeness, as joint acts of worship (or the intense support of one party) are perceived as sacred investments in their family.

At a more symbolic level, the post-Hajj attributes a white skullcap, turban, and robe for men; and the choice of a distinctive headscarf/telekung for women is interpreted as "markers of continuity." It is not just a style, but a language of piety that affirms the willingness to walk with the community in the corridors of sharia. Indeed, not all Hajjis/Hajjahs choose to accentuate these attributes; some articulate piety more privately. This diversity indicates that post-Hajj spirituality is not monolithic; there is a spectrum of expression, ranging from the symbolic-performative to the silent-existential.

Overall, the spiritual aspect of the title "Hajj" in Kayangan emphasises two things. Firstly, Hajj works as a ritual of identity purification as well as a locus of ongoing ethical learning. Second, the religious legitimacy attached to the title is not born from the title alone, but from the consistency of praxis: presence, contribution,

and honesty that can be felt by citizens. In other words, in the eyes of the Sasak Kayangan community, "Haji" is a promise. It demands realisation - a process that continues to be negotiated on a daily basis, between high religious ideals and complex social realities.

Symbolic Aspects: Social Capital, Symbolic Capital, and Role Negotiation

In addition to imprinting spiritual identity, the title "Haji" operates as a symbolic capital that has social exchange power. In Kayangan, respect, honorary greetings ("Pak Haji", "Bu Hajjah"), and strategic positions in community forums- for example, being asked to give advice at deliberations-reflect the accumulation of "social credentials" that come with the title. These credentials open up access to networks of trust: it is easier to be invited to partner in small economic activities, to be put forward as a citizen-agency liaison, and to be considered representative when conveying community aspirations. In daily practice, this means that the title "Haji" can facilitate cross-RT communication, accelerate the coordination of religious activities, and defuse conflicts between residents because his advice is considered "religiously weighted."

But symbolic capital is not static; it is negotiated through performance and perception. Informants pointed out that residents assess consistency: is a Haji present during gotong royong? Is he an "example of justice" when there is a small dispute? Is he transparent when co-managing social donations? If performance matches expectations, symbolic capital increases; if not, there is a "devaluation"-the title remains, but trust diminishes. This social evaluation mechanism reveals that symbols operate through collective recognition, which is fragile and requires nurturing.

In the institutional realm, the title "Haji" is often invoked to serve a mediating function. When a tug-of-war arises over the construction of village facilities or the scheduling of religious activities, Haji/Hajjah often becomes the "peacemaker" who arranges a compromise between youth groups, traditional leaders, and village officials. This gentle authority rests on two things: a reputation for piety (which calms) and an assumption of impartiality (which mediates). This mediative role demonstrates the conversion of symbolic capital into social capital - creating relational bridges that reduce friction and foster solidarity.

Of course, there was ambivalence. Some residents recognise the emergence of "representational pressure": Haji's every action is considered to reflect the community's moral standards. Lateness in attending pengajian, for example, can be seen as a decline in commitment; limited participation in social donations can be interpreted as a lack of enthusiasm. For this reason, some Hajjis opt for a strategy of "silent labour": helping without publicity, donating without being named, being present without standing out. This strategy maintains sincerity while avoiding the trap of "religious imaging" that citizens are wary of.

On the other hand, we observe the dynamics of title use in electoral spaces. During the village head or BPD election season, the title "Haji" is often raised in campaign materials to reinforce a clean and religious image. Citizens realise this and treat the title "critically": the title is valued, but the track record of public service and work commitment becomes the deciding factor for support. In other words, symbolic capital provides a "ticket of entry" for attention, but the social mandate is still determined by performance and integrity. This pattern shows the maturity of local politics: symbols are accepted, but they do not monopolise voters' rationality.

The gender aspect is also interesting. For women with the title "Hajjah", symbolic capital operates through spaces of moral nurturing, including mothers' recitation, children's education, and social solidarity (such as arisan, funeral funds, and posyandu). They are often the locomotives of good works, forging empathetic networks that strengthen social cohesion. At the same time, there are normative boundaries that are negotiated: some Hajjahs tend to avoid formal, very public positions, favouring 'leadership of influence' over 'leadership of office'. This is not only a result of patriarchal culture, but also a conscious choice to maintain the authenticity of contribution without being dragged down by formal politics.

In the village's moral economy, the title "Haji" also structures the ethics of exchange. Residents tend to entrust them with mandates—for example, collecting disaster donations, channelling zakat, or representing the village in sub-district forums. This trust is an asset, but even the slightest mismanagement and the erosion of trust can spread quickly. Therefore, respected Hajjis/Hajjahs usually practice simple transparency: they mention the amount of donations, report the distribution, and invite cross-group witnesses. This practice maintains the "exchange value" of symbolic capital from being depreciated by suspicion.

In this way, the symbolic aspect of the title "Haji" in Kayangan reveals a subtle ecology of power: it does not coerce, but influences; it does not command, but mobilises. This power derives from moral recognition, supplied by the consistency of behavior and social usefulness. Ultimately, symbols are only meaningful insofar as they are nurtured through tangible humanitarian works, such as helping the weak, mediating disputes, and maintaining the flow of values amidst changing times..

Degree-Based Social Stratification: Hierarchy, Distinction, and Cohesion

The third dimension that is strongly identified in Kayangan is the function of the title "Haji" as a guide to social stratification. The hierarchy formed is not a formal caste system, but rather a "symbolic hierarchy" that is evident in patterns of treatment, address, and access to spheres of influence. At village celebrations-weddings, circumcisions, thanksgiving-Haji/Hajjahs tend to be placed in the front row; at deliberative forums, they are asked to weigh in; in daily interactions, honorary greetings are automatically applied. All of this indicates a different "status group" in Weberian terms: not based solely on material possessions, but on mutually recognised honour.

This symbolic stratification works alongside the economic dimension. Because Hajj demands financial means (money, time, physical readiness), successful fulfilment is often associated with higher "means". While this is not always true - there are those who make the pilgrimage through long savings, selling assets, or family support - this association reinforces the narrative of success in the eyes of the community. As a result, the status "already Hajj/not yet Hajj" becomes a visible marker of differentiation. At the practical level, this differentiation affects the intensity of invitations, the frequency of being referred to for advice, and the opportunities to lead socio-religious activities.

However, stratification in Kayangan is not frozen. Symbolic mobility is possible through "social service" and "good deeds". Individuals who have not made the hajj but consistently devote themselves - teaching the Quran, mediating conflicts, helping neighbours - often gain a place of honour. Conversely, individuals with the title of Hajj who neglect their moral responsibilities may experience a "decline in prestige". This is where Kayangan's social cohesion rests: Title provides the starting

point for distinction, but symbolic justice is maintained by contribution-based judgement.

Stratification is also expressed through cultural artefacts: post-paid clothing becomes the "uniform of honour" on certain occasions. However, residents stress that clothing is only a marker; the core of honour lies in morals. This statement serves as an ethical mechanism to prevent "symbol inflation": if visual signifiers are not supported by behaviour, their value declines. For this reason, many Hajjis choose simplicity when attending village events-keeping a distance from luxury so that the symbol does not shift into an exclusive lifestyle that breaks down social distance.

In local politics, symbolic stratification interacts with the struggle for influence. The title "Haji" may increase "electoral capital", but Kayangan residents show pragmatic preferences: a track record of public service, communication skills and integrity are key variables. Therefore, while some candidates highlight their titles, winning still depends on performance. This minimises the risk of "symbolic oligarchy" - a condition where titles dominate access to power without accountability.

Another important aspect is the relationship of "Haji" with customary structures. In Sasak society, values such as good manners, deliberation, and *ajikrame* (togetherness) are the glue. "Haji" titles that are aligned with the *adat* ethos - humble, guiding without forcing, giving space to young voices - tend to be widely accepted. If the title is used to suppress or patronise, a subtle resistance arises: the community respects, but makes fewer references. Stratification in Kayangan is thus the result of a constant negotiation between religious symbols and communal norms: both correct each other to maintain harmony.

From a generational perspective, we see "new readings" of titles. Young people interpret "Haji" as an indicator of spiritual commitment, but they also demand ethical coherence-anti petty corruption, anti-hoax, pro-inclusion. This triggers a transformation of meaning: "Haji" is no longer merely a status; it is tested as a "value platform" for cross-age collaboration. Some Hajjahs pioneered the family literacy movement; some Hajjahs supported the *santri* entrepreneurship programme. This synergy reduces social distance and channels symbolic stratification in a productive direction - fostering, not dividing.

Finally, stratification based on the title "Haji" in Kayangan shows a double face: on the one hand, it builds a distinction that provides direction, example and reference; on the other hand, it has the potential to produce distance if not accompanied by empathic ethics. The community's resilience lies in its ability to balance the two: venerating symbols without glorifying them, respecting honour without ignoring equality of dignity. In daily life, this balancing act is realised in three key practices: (1) weighing contribution more than appearance, (2) viewing titles as trusts rather than exclusive privileges, and (3) placing the "common good" as the highest standard of status assessment.

Thus, the social stratification guided by the title "Haji" in Kayangan is not just a hierarchical map; it is a dynamic ecology of values. Religious symbols provide structure and direction, while communal ethics ensure that the structure remains spiritually inclusive, just and cohesion-enhancing. It is this ongoing negotiation that keeps the dual role of the title "Haji"-between spirituality and stratification-relevant, as well as constructive, for the future of Sasak society in Kayangan.

D. CONCLUSION

The study of the dual role of the title "Haji" in the Sasak community in Kayangan, North Lombok, reveals that this religious symbol is not only interpreted as a spiritual marker but also as a social instrument laden with the meanings of stratification and power. The title "Haji" was originally presented as a representation of the fulfillment of the fifth pillar of Islam, namely the pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah, which reflects the level of piety and obedience of a Muslim. However, in the social reality of Sasak society, this title underwent an expansion of meaning, becoming a symbol of prestige, honor, and social status that was integrated with local cultural and political structures.

Historical records indicate that the practice of embedding the title "Haji" in the archipelago has been ongoing since the 17th century in Banten, and was subsequently strengthened by Dutch colonial policies, ultimately spreading to various regions of Southeast Asia. In the Sasak context, the title "Haji" no longer merely asserts religious identity but also functions as symbolic capital to access important positions in the social and political hierarchy. As such, one's departure to the holy land is not always born out of a purely spiritual impulse, but is often influenced by

socio-economic considerations as well as the ambition to gain recognition and authority within the community.

Consequently, tensions arise between the spiritual significance of the pilgrimage and its practical use as a means of social mobility. This tension illustrates the ongoing process of identity negotiation in the daily lives of Sasak Muslim communities, where religion, economics, and politics are intertwined. The title "Haji" becomes a symbolic arena that affirms how religiosity can simultaneously reinforce social inequality. Thus, the dual role of the title "Haji" necessitates critical reflection: how to preserve the spiritual purity of Hajj without disregarding its integration into the social and political dynamics of society. This kind of understanding is important not only for the study of the sociology of religion but also for understanding the transformation of religious symbols in the modern era, when religious identities are often closely connected to the social and political dynamics of society.

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