

Besangi Ritual: Cultural Heritage and Spirituality of Pilgrims in Loang Baloq, Mataram City

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Abstract

The Besangi ritual at the tomb of Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak in Loang Baloq, Mataram City, represents a cultural and spiritual practice that integrates religious devotion, social ties, and symbolic heritage. In this tradition, pilgrims tie ropes to banyan trees surrounding the grave as symbolic acts of vows, supplications, or expressions of gratitude to God. This study explores the symbolic meaning, social function, and psychological role of the Besangi ritual for its practitioners. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that tying ropes symbolizes individual spiritual commitment and aspirations oriented toward the divine. The banyan tree is perceived as a sacred medium carrying deep cosmological significance within local belief systems. Socially, the ritual fosters communal solidarity and strengthens relationships among pilgrims, while psychologically, it provides coping mechanisms that instill tranquility, optimism, and resilience in the face of life's uncertainties. These aspects highlight Besangi not only as cultural heritage but also as a living medium for religious expression that continues to adapt to changing contexts. The study further suggests the importance of examining how modernization and the development of religious tourism in Lombok influence the transformation and continuity of this ritual tradition.

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

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A. INTRODUCTION

One local religious practice that is interesting to study is the Besangi ritual, which takes place at the Tomb of Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak, located within the traditional cemetery complex of Loang Baloq in Mataram, West Lombok. The tomb is revered as an important pilgrimage site as Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak is known as a great scholar who played a vital role in the spread of Islam in Lombok (Widyastuti, 2018). The complex holds a unique attraction, particularly the presence of a large old banyan tree in the graveyard, which serves as a focal point for a specific religious ritual, the Besangi ritual.

The Besangi ritual involves tying a rope or cloth to the branches of a banyan tree by pilgrims after visiting a cleric's grave. This seemingly simple act holds a deep constellation of symbolism; it is not only a symbolic ritual but also an expression of hope and supplication to Allah through the spiritual intercession of Maulana Syeh (Putra & Ayu, 2021). In the local community's understanding, the banyan tree serves as an intermediary medium, representing eternal life and spiritual power, thereby bridging the pilgrims' earthly dimension and the supernatural or divine world (Adiwibowo, 2020).

The study of the Besangi ritual is academically important because it has not been extensively examined. Its symbolic and functional complexity as a religious ritual, cultural practice, and medium of collectivity makes it an ideal entry point for understanding how Islamic beliefs and practices interact with the local traditions and culture of the Sasak people of Lombok. It also reflects how religious values are concretely realised in contemporary rituals (Sari et al, 2023).

Within the framework of symbolic anthropology, the Besangi ritual can be analysed as a treasure that contains moral messages, social control, and the formation of spiritual-pilgrim identity (Geertz, 1973). The ritual features a combination of ritual symbols (rope, banyan tree) and social practices (pilgrimage, physical binding) that converge in an experiential and emotional religious experience. Pilgrims, through the act of binding wishes, articulate spiritual narratives inherent to local traditions; without having to go to the holy land, they still interact intensely with the sacred realm and revered clerical figures (Ulumi, H. F. B. 2024).

This research aims to uncover three main dimensions: first-how the Besangi ritual is carried out in praxis by pilgrims; second-what symbolic meanings are contained, both in terms of material (ropes, trees), verbal (prayers, vows), and social (collectivity, communal ties); third-what impact this ritual has on individual spirituality and wider community cohesion. Through a qualitative and contextual approach, including participatory observation, in-depth interviews with pilgrims, traditional and religious leaders, and a review of local documentation, this study aims to present a comprehensive representation of this layered practice.

Theoretically, this research is in dialogue with studies of Islamic rituals in coastal Indonesia, which suggest that local pilgrimages such as the pilgrimage to the tombs of saints or scholars, while distant in ritual repetition from the hajj, still facilitate integral religious practices for people who do not always have access to Mecca (Markus, 2003; Hefner, 2000). In Loang Baloq, the Besangi ritual completes the local spiritual path, providing an alternative religious medium that balances the individual's relationship with God, the community, and spiritual ancestors. It transcends the profane-sacred dichotomy, as it revives spiritual solidarity wrapped in the symbol of the banyan tree's immortality.

Anthropologically, this ritual also shows the repositioning of the role of clerical figures after death. Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak remains "alive" through the tomb, and the practice of pilgrimage, involving the tying of a rope, is an indirect means of communication that symbolically invites his presence (Sulaeman, S., 2023). In anthropological studies of death, the tomb is often understood as a threshold between the worlds of the living and the dead; in Loang Baloq, the Besangi ritual reinforces the idea that the space of the tomb is an open space for the interaction of the living with the deceased sacred figure, making the tomb a means of spiritual renewal (Metcalf, 1995).

This study is also significant in terms of preserving intangible cultural heritage. The ability of the Besangi ritual to continue existing, with younger generations maintaining its continuity, shows that local congregations are actively affirming their identity and connecting the spiritual and social dimensions of togetherness. As such, it is not an "obsolete rite of passage" but a living medium relevant to the contemporary faith and spiritual needs of the Sasak people (Smith, 2006).

B. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design to gain an in-depth understanding of the Besangi ritual practice, its significance for pilgrims, and its socio-cultural implications at the Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak Tomb complex in Loang Baloq, Mataram. The ethnographic approach was chosen because it allows researchers to enter the field, observe ritual practices in the context of participants' daily lives, and record the narratives and meanings constructed by the actors (Spradley, 1979; Emerson et al. 2011).

Research Locus and Time. The research was conducted at the Loang Baloq tomb complex, the location of the Besangi ritual centre, with fieldwork taking place over approximately three months in 2024. Intensive on-site presence supported participatory observation at various pilgrimage moments (weekdays, funeral days, and special commemorations) so that variations in practice could be captured.

Sample and Informant Collection Technique. Informants were selected purposively, with the criteria of relevance to ritual experience and knowledge. The sample consisted of pilgrims who regularly perform Besangi, their families, cemetery administrators, local religious leaders, as well as key informants such as traditional elders and local traders, for a total of 25 in-depth interview informants. This purposive approach aims to obtain a rich variety of perspectives (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection Techniques. Data were collected using three main techniques: (1) participatory observation-researchers observed and recorded the ritual procession, social interactions, and the practice of tying ropes/cloths to banyan trees; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews-explored pilgrims' religious experiences, motivations, and perceived symbolic meanings; and (3) documentation-collected local archival records, photographs, video recordings of rituals (with permission), and literature related to tombs and local traditions (Nugroho, 2018). Observations were documented through structured field notes and ethnographic photographs; interviews were audio-recorded after obtaining the informants' consent, and then transcribed verbatim (Hadi, A., 2021).

Data Analysis. Analysis followed the stages of thematic analysis: data familiarisation, initial coding, theme building, theme revision, and final thematic interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of data reduction and

presentation of results was conducted according to qualitative analysis procedures (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). To facilitate qualitative data management, the researcher utilized NVivo software (version 12) for data coding and retrieval. The final analysis was enriched with a thematic matrix and selected quotes to illustrate the findings. Data Validity and Credibility. Validity was enhanced through source triangulation (comparing the narratives of pilgrims, religious leaders, and tomb caretakers), method triangulation (utilizing observation, interviews, and documentation), and member checking, which involved presenting a summary of findings to several key informants for confirmation of interpretations (Denzin, 2017; Patton, 1999). Detailed field notes and an analytical audit trail were also kept for transparency of the interpretation process

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The people of Lombok, especially those residing around the Loang Balog tomb, observe a significant grave pilgrimage tradition that is rich in meaning and has been passed down for generations. This pilgrimage is not just a visit to the grave, but a spiritual ritual performed to pray and recite dhikr to Allah SWT, asking for His forgiveness and mercy. Those who come on pilgrimage often undertake this journey with special desires or needs, such as seeking healing, blessings in business, or safety in travel, including before departure for the pilgrimage (Abdullah, 2022).

The Loang Balog cemetery, the final resting place of respected scholars, is considered a sacred and blessed place. As such, pilgrims also ask for intercession and blessings from these scholars as intermediaries for prayers to Allah SWT (Ibda, 2019). This is in line with Islamic teachings that encourage grave pilgrimage, as long as the intention and implementation of the pilgrimage is purely intended to worship Allah SWT alone, without associating Him with invoking the occupants of the tomb. Therefore, the pilgrimage rituals carried out by Juma'ah and his family, who come to the Loang Balog tomb, especially at the tomb of Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak, are a manifestation of faith that does not contradict religious teachings, but rather a form of respect for ancestors and strengthening spiritual ties with Allah SWT.

The Besangi ritual, which takes place at the tomb complex of Maulana Sheikh Gauz Abdurrozak Loang Baloq in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, demonstrates a unique blend of Islamic teachings and local cultural practices deeply rooted in the

lives of the people of Lombok. More than just a tradition, this ritual is rich in symbolism, social functions, and complex psychological implications, and requires further study to fully understand its meaning and role in people's lives (Lombok Adiwibawa, D. N., 2024). A more in-depth analysis will examine various aspects of the Besangi ritual, including its detailed implementation procedures, the symbols used and their meanings, the social function of the ritual for the community, and the psychological impact on pilgrims who participate in the ritual.

***Besangi* Ritual Procedures and Practices**

The Besangi ritual is not a practice performed spontaneously and without rules. Although it is not bound by a rigid and standardized procedure, there are generally established flows and stages that pilgrims follow (Ulumi, 2024). The process begins with the arrival of pilgrims to the Loang Baloq cemetery complex. Pilgrims, whether coming individually or in groups, usually bring a number of paraphernalia, including flowers, water, and most importantly, colourful ropes or cloth, often white mori cloth. Before performing the core rituals, they typically begin with a pilgrimage to the tomb of Maulana Syed Gauz Abdurrozak. This involves reciting prayers, such as Al-Fatiha, and other supplications as a form of honor and asking for intercession on behalf of the deceased.

After completing the pilgrimage, the pilgrims then head to the large banyan tree that is the centre of the Besangi ritual. This banyan tree, with its sturdy roots and shady branches, symbolises life, immortality, and spiritual power in the view of the local people. Under the shade of this sacred banyan tree, the core process of the Besangi ritual is performed. Pilgrims solemnly tie the ropes or cloths they carry to the branches of the tree. While tying, they usually whisper their wishes or requests to God Almighty, asking for the intercession of Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak. Some pilgrims also add knots to the rope ties as a symbol of strengthening these hopes and requests.

Interestingly, there are no fixed rules regarding the type and number of ropes or cloth tied, the colours chosen, or the type of wish being prayed for. This demonstrates the flexibility of the Besangi ritual in accommodating the diverse needs and desires of individual pilgrims. This freedom highlights the personal and intimate nature of the ritual, allowing each pilgrim to approach God in a manner that is most

meaningful to them. After finishing the tying of the ropes or cloths, pilgrims generally continue the pilgrimage by praying and making wishes.

After their wishes are fulfilled, the pilgrims will return to the location to untie the rope or cloth that bound them. This release process is a moment of gratitude and an expression of gratitude to God. There is no specific time requirement for the release of these ties; it depends entirely on the pilgrims' perception and belief in the fulfilment of their wishes.

Symbolism and Meaning of the *Besangi* Ritual

The *Besangi* ritual in Loang Baloq, Mataram City, is not merely a ceremonial practice devoid of meaning. It represents a deeply symbolic and multifaceted tradition that integrates spirituality, culture, psychology, and social cohesion. Rooted in the sacred tomb of Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak, the ritual reflects how the Sasak Muslim community negotiates its relationship with the divine while simultaneously reinforcing social and cultural identity.

One of the central symbolic elements of the ritual is the banyan tree, which holds profound cosmological and cultural meaning for the people of Lombok. Traditionally, the banyan tree is not seen merely as a plant but as a sacred entity imbued with spiritual power and a bridge between the human and supernatural realms (Janutama, 2012). Its roots, which penetrate deeply into the earth, symbolize strength, resilience, and immortality, while its wide branches represent the vastness of spiritual power and divine protection. In the context of *Besangi*, the banyan tree serves as a spiritual intermediary, linking pilgrims' prayers to God through the blessing and legacy of Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak. Thus, the tree becomes more than just a physical site; it embodies sacredness, continuity, and the eternal bond between human aspirations and divine will.

The rope or cloth tied by pilgrims around the banyan tree symbolizes a binding contract between their personal hopes and God's providence. The act of tying reflects a vow, a pledge, or a request, embodying the pilgrims' determination and dependence on divine assistance. Different colors of ropes or cloth are often used, representing the diversity of human needs ranging from health and livelihood to education and family harmony. This diversity illustrates how the ritual becomes a repository of collective aspirations across generations.

The addition of knots to these ropes further intensifies the symbolism. Knots signify the strengthening of intentions and the seriousness of one's spiritual request. A tightly bound knot mirrors the pilgrim's determination, persistence, and hope that their prayer will not dissolve into uncertainty. Symbolically, knots embody both the complexity of human problems and the firmness of faith in God's ability to untangle those problems.

Equally significant is the ritual of releasing the ropes once a wish has been fulfilled. This act symbolizes gratitude and a sense of balance in the relationship between humans and God. It represents acknowledgment that the divine has responded to human supplication, thereby reaffirming the reciprocal nature of prayer and blessing. Untying the ropes also prevents stagnation; it ensures that the banyan tree does not become overloaded with permanent ties but remains a dynamic site of ongoing interaction between pilgrims and the divine.

Beyond its individual meanings, the Besangi ritual carries a vital social function. Pilgrims often come with families, neighbors, or community groups, transforming the ritual into a communal event. The act of gathering at the tomb fosters togetherness, intimacy, and solidarity. The shared experience of tying ropes, praying, and seeking blessings strengthens social bonds within the community. It also serves as an informal means of socialization, where values of patience, gratitude, and faith are transmitted.

This ritual also plays a role in preserving cultural and religious identity. By maintaining this tradition across generations, the community demonstrates resilience against the cultural homogenization brought about by modernization and globalization (Fazira, 2024). The Besangi ritual becomes a medium for cultural continuity, reinforcing a sense of belonging and local pride. It serves as a living archive of religious heritage, ensuring that the values embedded within it, such as reliance on God, respect for saints, and solidarity, are not lost but continuously reproduced in contemporary contexts.

In addition to its cultural and spiritual significance, Besangi has strong psychological functions for participants. In the face of modern challenges, economic uncertainty, and personal struggles, the ritual offers a coping mechanism that alleviates stress and anxiety (Amal & Ningsih, 2025). The act of tying a rope, concentrating in prayer, and entrusting problems to God instills calmness and

reassurance. Pilgrims feel that their worries have been externalized and transferred to a higher power, which reduces feelings of helplessness.

Moreover, the return to untie the rope once a wish is granted reinforces gratitude and self-confidence. It creates a cycle of optimism: pilgrims experience that their prayers can indeed be answered, motivating them to face new challenges with greater faith. The process not only provides inner peace but also reinforces resilience and positive psychological states such as hope, patience, and trust (Prasanti & Indriani, 2017).

The Besangi ritual, while deeply rooted in tradition, is not static. It evolves within the shifting contexts of modernization and religious tourism in Lombok. With an increasing number of domestic and international visitors, the ritual site has become a cultural attraction. This dual role, as both a sacred practice and part of Lombok's religious tourism, presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it ensures the visibility and sustainability of the ritual; on the other, it raises concerns about commercialization and the dilution of spiritual meaning. Future research is needed to critically examine how Besangi adapts to these pressures while maintaining its authenticity as a spiritual practice.

The Besangi ritual at Loang Baloq is a rich cultural and spiritual tradition that encapsulates the interplay of symbolism, spirituality, social bonding, and psychological resilience. From the sacred banyan tree to the ropes and knots, each element carries profound meaning that reflects human dependence on divine grace. At the same time, the ritual strengthens communal ties, preserves cultural identity, and provides a psychological buffer against life's uncertainties. In its continuity and transformation, Besangi stands as a testament to the resilience of local traditions in navigating the tensions between spirituality, culture, and modernity.

D. CONCLUSION

The Besangi ritual at the tomb of Maulana Syeh Gauz Abdurrozak, Loang Baloq, Mataram, is a tradition that holds religious and cultural significance for the people of Lombok. The practice of tying ropes to the banyan trees around the tomb is not only seen as a symbol of prayer, hope, and supplication to the Almighty, but also represents a form of spiritual commitment that is "tied" to the values of faith. The banyan tree, as the primary object in this ritual, holds a strong cosmological

significance in the Nusantara tradition, serving as a symbol of shade, strength, and a link between the human world and the spiritual realm. Besides its religious dimension, the Besangi ritual also plays a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion and fostering collective solidarity. It provides a space for social interaction, where people from diverse backgrounds can meet, share experiences, and foster a sense of community. Thus, Besangi is not just an individual spiritual practice, but also a social phenomenon that affirms the cultural identity of the Lombok people.

On the other hand, this practice illustrates the dialectic between Islamic teachings and local wisdom that is embedded in the community. Besangi can be understood as a form of acculturation, where Islamic religious values meet with traditional cultural symbols, resulting in religious practices that are unique, dynamic, and still relevant to the social context of the community. The presence of this ritual confirms that religion and local culture are not always in a mutually negating position; instead, they can coexist and enrich each other. Thus, Besangi not only functions as a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved, but also as a spiritual and social tool capable of shaping community harmony. Further research is needed to explore how this ritual has evolved in the midst of modernization, as well as its potential to be developed as part of sustainable religious tourism in Lombok.

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