

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEMARCATION: THE MYSTICISM DIMENSION IN THE PAJONJONG BAGAS TRADITION BY THE BATAK ANGKOLA MUSLIM COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the mystical dimensions of the pajonjong bagas ceremony, a series of rituals in building a new house, as part of the culture of the Batak Angkola community. In this ceremony, several rituals contain mystical elements, to negative influence the beliefs of Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah. This qualitative research uses an ethnographic approach. Data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation of the entire pajonjong bagas ceremonial processes in the Batang Angkola sub-district, South Tapanuli. The results showed that the pajonjong bagas encompassed a high philosophical value and were highly beneficial for the community, including building social harmony, environmental awareness, integration of culture and religious spirituality, specifically for those establishing new houses and still deeply rooted in local traditions or wisdom. However, several elements of the rituals were not explicitly studied or significant in the teachings of Islam. Various symbols were also used in the ceremony, such as coconut, sugarcane and palm sugar, chayote, and banana symbolizing usefulness, sweet speech actualization, continuity, and coolness. All these symbols were assembled and hung on the rabung bukkulan, a wooden structure used as a framework. This cultural accommodation was subsequently associated with local and Sufi mysticism.

Keywords: *Ahl Sunnah Wal Jama'ah; Islamic Mysticism; Batak Angkola Community; History Studies; Ritual*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan mengungkapkan dimensi mistisisme dalam upacara pajonjong bagas yang merupakan rangkaian prosesi pendirian rumah baru sebagai bagian dari kebudayaan masyarakat Batak Angkola. Dalam rangkaian upacara adat tersebut, terdapat beberapa ritual yang mengandung dimensi mistisisme yang berpeluang besar memberi pengaruh negatif terhadap akidah Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah. Penelitian

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kualitatif ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi. Data dihimpun dari observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi atas rangkaian proses acara pajonjong bagas di kecamatan Batang Angkola, Tapanuli Selatan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun beberapa rangkaian aktivitas pajonjong bagas tidak menjadi kajian khusus dan signifikan dalam kitab ajaran agama Islam, namun acara-acara tersebut memiliki nilai filosofis yang tinggi dan sangat berguna bagi masyarakat, antara lain membangun harmonisme sosial, kepedulian lingkungan, integrasi budaya dan spiritualitas agama, khususnya mereka yang mendirikan rumah baru dan masih kental dengan tradisi atau kearifan lokal. Kelapa menjadi simbol kebermanfaatannya, tebu dan gula aren sebagai simbol aktualisasi tutur kata yang manis, labu siam sebagai simbol kelanggengan, pisang sebagai simbol kesejukan yang dirangkai satu kesatuan digantung di rabung bukkulan (reng kayu tempat seng dipakukan). Akomodasi budaya lokal ini terkait mistisisme lokal dan mistisisme tasawuf.

Kata Kunci: *Ahl Sunnah Wal Jama'ah; Mistisisme Islam; Masyarakat Batak Angkola; Kajian Sejarah; Ritual*

مستخلص

تهدف هذه المقالة إلى الكشف عن أبعاد التصوف في احتفال باجونجونج باجاس وهو عبارة عن سلسلة من المواقب لبناء منزل جديد كجزء من ثقافة شعب أنغكولا باتاك. في هذه السلسلة من الاحتفالات التقليدية، هناك العديد من الطقوس التي تحتوي على بُعد من التصوف التي لديها فرصة كبيرة للتأثير على معتقدات أهل السنة والجماعة. يستخدم هذا البحث النوعي نهجًا إثنوغرافيًا. تم جمع البيانات من الملاحظات والمقابلات والتوثيق لعملية ابني منزل في منطقة أنغكولا باتاك الفرعية، جنوب.

الكلمات الرئيسية: : أهل السنة والجماعة; التصوف الإسلامي; مجتمع أنغكولا باتاك; الدراسات التاريخية، الطقوس.

A. Introduction

Batak Angkola community¹ is popular for three traditional cycles observed within the realm of mysticism, namely *haroan boru* (wedding ceremony), *tubuan anak* (childbirth), and *masuk bagas naimbaru* (entering a new house). These aspects are always accompanied by ceremonies involving extended family, community members, traditional leaders, religious figures, and others with several mysticism elements. In this study, the *masuk bagas naimbaru* tradition is highly emphasized, specifically the rituals within the *pajonjong bagas*, a custom of building a new house. Because, compared to other rituals such as *haroan boru* and *tubuan anak*, the *masuk bagas naimbaru* rituals contain mystical dimensions manifested and perpetuated through symbolic objects, verbal expressions, and offerings perceived as sacred and a form of prayer.²

¹ Angkola is taken from the name of the area of Batang Angkola Sub-district, South Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia.

² Results of observations when building and entering houses for the Batak Angkola community in Batang Angkola Sub-district, April-July 2022.

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As a foundation of religious belief, faith should be clear, steadfast, and free from *ikhtilat* (mixing) between *tauhid* and *syirik*, as well as superstition and irrational mindsets. From this context, several parameters are often used to measure faith, such as *waham*, *syak*, *zhan*, and *yakin*. When quantified on a scale from 1 to 100%, *waham* commonly indicates a -50% inclination towards disbelief, with *syak* reflecting a 50% belief and 50% doubt. This is accompanied by *zhan* leaning closer to 51-99% certainty, with *yakin* at 100%. In these contexts, certainty emphasizes rational logic leading to *ilmul yaqin*, and when supported by empirical evidence through direct observation, it becomes *ainul yaqin*. Faith also reaches *haqqul yaqin* when grounded in philosophical values. Moreover, knowledge is an important trait due to its ability to dispel the mystical dimensions within cultural and religious customs. This indicates that religious teachings carry ideal normative messages while cultural traditions represent the realities in human cultured life, regardless of both features intersecting and influencing the behavior of mankind.³ Religion and culture are also two intertwined components that are difficult to separate from human life, emphasizing religious and cultural beings. However, the following question is observed, "*Can Muslims with relatively lower religious education comprehend and distinguish traditions with mystical indications from religious traditions and their formulated rituals?*". This question is reinterpreted as follows, "*Can the Muslims understand and differentiate between Shari'a and the deeper spiritual essence without falling into hidden syirik and damaging the nature of their faith?*"⁴

Based on these descriptions, the emphasized mysticism is the understanding of seeking a conscious and purposeful relationship with Allah. This prioritizes believing in the communication and dialogue between the human soul and Allah,⁵ symbolized by meaningful-philosophical attributes and offerings in several local traditions within the study of Sufi belief. In building and entering new houses for the predominantly Muslim population of Batak Angkola, collaboration is also commonly observed between culture and Islamic teachings. This serves as essential education for the community to classify the realms of culture and religion, specifically in the sub-study of mysticism.⁶ However, the core issue depends on the mixture of cultural customs with the teachings of Islam, implicitly (*khafi*) and explicitly (*jali*) emphasizing the importance of *tanzih* toward *syirik*. From this context, *syirik* originates from

³ C.A. van Peursen, *Strategi Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1988), 149.

⁴ Ali Masrur, "Relasi Iman Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan Dalam Perspektif Al-Quran: Sebuah Kajian Tafsir Maudhui," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (June 2016): 35–52, <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v1i1.1672>.

⁵ Harun Nasution, *Falsafah & Mistisisme Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1989), 56.

⁶ Moh. Isa Pramana Koesoemadinata, "Wayang Kulit Cirebon: Warisan Diplomasi Seni Budaya Nusantara," *ITB Journal of Visual Art and Design*, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.5614/itbj.vad.2013.4.2.6>.

the Arabic word, "*syarika*," emphasizing association or partnership. In Sufi monotheism (*tauhid tasawuf*), *syirik* also involves a person believing in powers beyond Allah, which manifest in both the external and internal dimensions.⁷ The determination to prioritize the engagement of people in *syirik* is subsequently very challenging due to being within their inner beliefs and not externally apparent. Despite local traditions persisting in contemporary life as cultural wisdom, public clarification is still needed regarding the amalgamation of culture and religious teachings. These teachings contain mysticism in their ceremonial practices, as well as encompass the faith and belief system of a Muslim.

Several scholars are also able to discern the subtle distinctions between cultural practices and religious beliefs. This is because several forms of *syirik* include cursing the creations of Allah and idolizing the elements condemned through the teachings of His prophets. This issue depends on the ability of the general public and not local culture resistance, to differentiate between cultural practices and religious beliefs as a Muslim *Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah*. In *tauhid*, the dimension of *tasybih* (resemblance) is also crucial to prevent people from having beliefs and hopes in anything aside from Allah. Meanwhile, in *pajonjong bagas*, various indications of mysticism are far from *tasybih*, accompanied by the potential risk of causing *syirik* due to specific rituals prioritizing many elements besides Allah.

Several studies have reportedly explored the intersection of culture and religion containing mystical dimensions, such as Salma Al Zahra Ramadhani and Nor Mohammad Abdoeh, which emphasized the *punggah* tradition practiced by the Javanese community before Ramadan. This tradition involved the movement to a high destination to read prayers and offerings to ancestors. *Apem*, *pasung*, bananas, and sticky rice were also the menu items that should be prepared for the tradition.⁸ According to A. Jauhar Fuad, the *tlatah* tradition of the Mataraman community in East Java was analyzed, involving the accommodation of local culture with religious teachings.⁹ Dara Gebrina Rezioka Dara, Khamim Zarkasih Putro, and Mohammad Irsyad also studied the Acehese tradition of *Mee buu*, a cultural ceremony to

⁷ Bukhori At-Tunisi, *Konsep Teologi Ibn Taimiyah* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2017), 357.

⁸ Salmaa Al Zahra Ramadhani and Nor Mohammad Abdoeh, "Tradisi Punggahan Menjelang Ramadhan," *Al-Mada: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 3, no. 1 (March 2020): 51–65, <https://doi.org/10.31538/almada.v3i1.495>.

⁹ A. Jauhar Fuad, "Tlatah Dan Tradisi Keagamaan Islam Mataraman," *Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 30, no. 1 (January 2019): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v30i1.659>.

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commemorate the seventh month for pregnant women, prioritizing blessings, safety, and happiness.¹⁰

From these descriptions, no article was found discussing the mystical dimensions related to religion and culture in the Batak Angkola community, specifically within the tradition of *pajonjong bagas*. Therefore, this study aims to determine the mystical dimensions of the pajonjong bagas ceremony, a series of rituals in building a new house, as part of the culture of the Batak Angkola community, South Tapanuli. In this ethnographic analysis, data collection is conducted through observations within the community, specifically focusing on the mystical dimensions within the tradition of *pajonjong bagas* during the *panaek bukkulan*, a ritual of raising the roof with seng being the roofing material. Interviews and documentation are also carried out with local community members, specifically traditional elders.

B. Discussion

1. *Mysticism in Religion and Cultural Traditions*

According to Harun Nasution's theory, mysticism was equivalent to Sufism, which was specifically used by Orientalists to emphasize Islam. Meanwhile, mysticism was a more general term encompassing all mystical beliefs, including those within Islam.¹¹ This indicated that the scope of the beliefs included all supernatural mindsets, perceived as sacred and transcendental from monotheistic religious teachings or other cultural traditions. In this case, religious teachings and cultural practices often coexisted and became fields of study concerning mixed traditions and rituals. As a monotheistic religion, Islam also taught the oneness of Allah, with no partners, and was affirmed by a Muslim through *tauhid uluhiyah*, *rububiyah*, and *asma wa sifat*. From this context, *Tauhid* was derived from the Arabic word, "*wahid*", which was interpreted as "one". This implied the act of singling out or unifying Allah to acknowledge His oneness in a Muslim life at all times and in every circumstance, specifically when formulated in the *fiil tsulasi* with *wazan wahhada yuwahhidu tauhidan* and *muta'addi/transitive* form. Therefore, faith should be relevant to the statements consistently

¹⁰ Dara Gebrina Rezieka Dara, Khamim Zarkasih Putro, and Mohammad Irsyad, "Analisis Adat Budaya Aceh Pada Tradisi Mee Buih Tujuh Bulanan Ibu Hamil," *Jurnal Pelita PAUD* 6, no. 1 (December 2021): 92–101, <https://doi.org/10.33222/pelitapaud.v6i1.1494>.

¹¹ Nasution, *Falsafah & Mistisisme Dalam Islam*.

affirmed, specifically through actions, due to being within the realm of belief encompassing speech, commitment, attitude, intention, will, action, and knowledge.¹²

For Westerners, religion was considered part of culture, categorized within the continuum and domain of human behavior and actions, from primitive times to contemporary thought. This was because religious behavior persisted throughout both primitive and modern life. Similarly, its teachings were perceived and believed to originate from God or Allah for the Indonesian community, with culture being derived from human creation manifested through creativity, emotions, thoughts, and training.¹³ According to this theory, two types of religion were found, namely cultural and heavenly spirituality. These religious features were commonly believed by their respective followers and were filled with traditions and rituals. Mysticism also emerged as a central issue, intertwined with the religious practices and local cultural customs rarely studied comprehensively. In these intertwined features, many ceremonies providing a calming refuge and obtaining public recognition as cultural heritage and local wisdom were found. A form of acculturation was also observed between religious teachings and local cultural practices, emphasizing various influences and encounters between both features. This acculturation encompassed juxtaposing religious and cultural teachings while undergoing collaboration. The notion was also exemplified by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad Sunnah, *zayyinu buyutakum bilqur'an wa la tattakhizu qubura*, which emphasized the following, "Adorn your homes with the Qur'an and do not turn them into graves". In addition, the Qur'an stated the following, "Wala taj'alu lillahi andadan wa antum ta'lamun", meaning "do not knowingly set up equals to Allah".

Based on these descriptions, the consideration of Allah as plural emphasized associating partners with Him, both explicitly (*jaly*) and implicitly (*khafy*). However, Muslims were explicitly capable of refraining from participating in behaviors emphasizing the duality or multiplicity of Allah. This was because the Islamic believers were able to perceive a potency inherent in the individual or collective objects or circumstances manifested within their spiritualities and lives. The perception of power also commonly rivaled or even surpassed the significance of Allah, specifically during ceremonial rituals.¹⁴ Moreover, religion was a belief system considered a guide for life in the world by its adherents. It also

¹² Nunu Burhanuddin, "Prinsip Epistemologi Makrifat Dalam Tasawuf Bagi Penguatan Karakter," *Jurnal Fuaduna: Jurnal Kajian Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 4, no. 2 (December 2020): 114, <https://doi.org/10.30983/fuaduna.v4i2.3593>.

¹³ Jannes Alexander Uhi, *Filsafat Kebudayaan: Konstruksi Pemikiran Cornelis Anthonie van Peursen Dan Catatan Reflektifnya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2016), 83.

¹⁴ John Middleton, *Lugbara Religion: Ritual And Authority among an East African People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 27.

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emphasized the patterns of confronting the afterlife, encompassing at least four aspects, namely beliefs (*aqidah*), religious law (*shari'a*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and values.¹⁵ In this case, a belief system only had two aspects, namely beliefs and rituals, with the same principle applying to traditions, which prioritized the emergence of culture and included the simultaneous performance of sacred events.

Traditions were also characterized by concepts passed down through generations, transcending time boundaries, gaining legitimacy from prominent figures or communities, containing symbols or codes, involving processes, having specific purposes, places of refuge, and reflecting real-life experiences. It also always incorporated rituals, techniques, and methods transforming customs into sacred or holy practices. From this context, rituals were perceived as magical ceremonies with sacred qualities capable of providing comfort.¹⁶ According to building and entering houses in the Batak Angkola community,¹⁷ including Muslims, several ceremonial rituals¹⁸ seemingly encompassed both the domain of religion and culture. These rituals involved the Islamic beliefs and traditions passed down through generations, including various symbolic attributes, offerings, elaborate language, and verses recited by *panusunan bulung* known as *orang kaya* (knowledgeable individuals, *peñata hukum adat istiadat*, or the traditional legal experts of the local community). From this context, the *orang kaya* were skilled in organizing and conducting ritualistic traditions.

Based on a *haroan boru* (wedding ceremony), a bride was instructed to step on the *dingin-dingin* flowers (cooling flowers) placed on a banana stem skin at the entrance floor, when being escorted into the house of the groom. At that moment, one of the mothers from the groom side stated the following, "*Degebo parumaen dingin-dingin dohot kulit ni batang ni pisangon aso borgo haroromon*", translated as "*Step on this cooling flower and the skin of the banana stem, hence you will feel calm and at ease in your arrival here*". In another event, *tubuan anak* (childbirth), an Islamic *aqiqah* ceremony was always held. However, a mixture of practices was commonly conducted between religious teachings and local culture, subsequently becoming a topic of discussion within the community. For example, the

¹⁵ Saliyo Saliyo, "Selayang Pandang Harmonisasi Spiritual Sufi Dalam Psikologi Agama," *Psikoislamika: Jurnal Psikologi Dan Psikologi Islam* 11, no. 2 (December 2014): 5–11, <https://doi.org/10.18860/psi.v11i2.6383>.

¹⁶ Abdul Manan, "The Ritual of First Infant Bathing in Aceh: An Ethnographic Study in West Labuhan Haji, South Aceh," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v3i2.5466>.

¹⁷ Observations showed that there were sugarcane, bananas, coconut seeds and palm sugar displayed on the tops of the ceilings of houses that had not yet been given a tin roof, Sibulele Muara Village, Batang Angkola Sub-district, April 18, 2022.

¹⁸ The thanksgiving event by calling neighbors to hold recitation and *tahlilan* as a prayer, hence the new house is worth the blessing for those who own it and those who occupy it.

inclusion of young coconuts, *dingin dingin* flowers (cooling flowers), salt, palm sugar, ginger, and other elements as part of the ritual to name a child was customary. The slogan of the Batak Angkola community also stated the following, '*Hombar adat dohot ugamo*,'¹⁹ indicating that customs and culture coexisted side by side (not merged). In practice, both phenomena were always intertwined, fused, and regarded with equal sacredness and magical power. Customs and culture were also parallel to each other due to the coexistence of religious and cultural teachings as a value system for the Batak Angkola community, according to the local traditions. In this case, coexisting emphasized being on the same level, positioning culture alongside religion, and coloring the ongoing event. Meanwhile, the alignment of religious and cultural teachings was not an easy task, specifically for community members with a lower level of education. This was because the process of comparison required *bayani* more than *burhani* and *irfani*.²⁰

From these descriptions, the two substances of religious and cultural teachings blended to form a unified manifestation in the ceremony of building a new house. This showed that various items were displayed on the central post of the roof structure, such as banana stems or bunches, when the seng (roofing material) was attached during the "*rabung*" phase. It was also more appropriate when several of the bunches were ripe and eaten by the workers at any time. Moreover, sugarcane stems, grown coconuts ready for planting, palm sugar, and a ritual similar to the call to prayer (*azan*) were observed. From these contexts, religion was inherent in human nature, from primitive to modern life, and its manifestation always radiated in the lives of the followers. Based on the possessed intellect, humans were similar capable of weighing feelings and having aspirations. This demonstrated that while culture superficially preceded religion, religious practices initially existed among humans, as affirmed by the Qur'an in Surah al-A'raf: 172. Various sociologists also observed a close interconnection between the structure of society, culture, social structure, and ecology. This encompassed non-material cultural aspects such as aesthetics, beliefs, norms, values, and attitudes.²¹ In addition, the Qur'an in Surah Qaaf: 18 mentioned that every human action was under the supervision of Allah.²²

¹⁹ Interview with Insur Harahap (a traditional leader in Pargumbangan village, Angkola Muara Tais sub-district, South Tap. North Sumatra, April 7, 2022).

²⁰ Nani Widiawati, *Pluralisme Metodologi: Diskursus Sains, Filsafat, Dan Tasawuf* (Tasikmalaya: Edu Publisher, 2020), 176–77.

²¹ Nina W. Syam, *Model Model Komunikasi Perspektif Pohon Komunikasi* (Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media, 2018), 69.

²² Jalaluddin Abdur Rahnman Ibn Abi Bakr Al-Suyuti, *Al Dur Al Mantsur Fi Al Tafsir Al Ma'Tsu Juz VI* (Beirut: Dar Al Ilmiyah, 1990), 118–19.

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Based on the perspective of Prophet Muhammad in a narration by Imam Bukhari, the association of partners with Allah (*syirik*) was the greatest sin regardless of the inseparability of humans from their culture. This was because people had beliefs in supernatural powers, leading to the emergence of the value systems that always supported their life activities. These systems were often deeply ingrained informally and non-formally within the community, causing difficult transitions. The value system also became an unwritten rule and served as a standard of the good or bad elements existing in every community, from the most primitive to the higher level of monotheism.²³ Furthermore, traditions were capable of representing activities, ideas, material objects, or other teachings originating from the previous and present eras. From this context, ideas encompassed beliefs or faith, symbols, norms, values, or rules.²⁴ This was because the community orientation and enthusiasm consistently upheld traditions while navigating the dynamics of life, attributing sacredness and positive impacts according to the perspectives of their proponents. Traditions were also capable of diminishing or being altered when proponents shifted their focus, disregarding popular existing elements regardless of continuity preservation.

According to these narrations, traditions were capable of generating culture, which emphasized three sacred aspects, namely (1) A complex of ideas, concepts, values, norms, rules, and others, (2) A complex of the behavioral activities practiced by individuals as community members, and (3) The material objects produced by human endeavors.²⁵ In Islam, many traditions in various regions also blended with native customs, commonly known as local wisdom. This showed that traditional and religious leaders rarely had a forum to discuss the intricacies, scope, and domains of cultural traditions and spiritual practices. From this context, the leaders embodied the inheritance and formulated both distinct substances into a form of prayer through their actions. The integration slogan was also commonly equivalent to cultural practices with religious prayers, due to the belief that all human efforts emphasized the traditional methods of requesting desires through actions. Moreover, *hombardo adat dohot ugamo* emphasized the parallel existence of culture and religion. This demonstrated that before the arrival of religion, the ancestors practiced their beliefs with a culture rich in

²³ Amsal Bakhtiar, *Filsafat Agama* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2007), 56–57.

²⁴ Mark Purcell, "State, Space, World: Selected Essays," *Social & Cultural Geography* 13, no. 2 (March 2012): 70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2012.663562>.

²⁵ Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2015), 6.

symbols, offerings, and rituals.²⁶ Traditions also emerged from the grassroots involving the common people, driven by various reasons, such as charismatic individuals, organizational inheritance, and historical significance. These reasons were admired, preserved, and spread till the integration into attitudes, behaviors, and social facts. Some traditions were also introduced from the top down through instruction and indoctrination.

Based on these descriptions, traditions were capable of being changed, abandoned, or manifested differently. This was specifically emphasized when the traditional adjustments clashed with new superior realities and teachings regarding established principles and unshakable formulas, through intellectual exploration. The aspect also served as beneficial norms, beliefs, and values, providing legitimacy to communal life for adherents, as well as strengthening primordial loyalty through societal symbols, identity, and ethical codes. Furthermore, the traditional adjustment was a refuge for complaints, collective anxieties, and innate energies transforming into comfort. In this case, traditions were maintained through normal generational habits and seldom encountered criticism. This indicated that only the traditions influenced by harmful ideologies posed a danger, while others became cultural treasures of the nation, reference points for comparison, and tourist attractions when preserved as historical sites. One of the dangerous aspects was also observed when the existence of helpers or powers besides Allah was implied. Therefore, the mystical dimension within traditions should be deeply studied to portray the essential values and beliefs embedded in the cosmology of each culture.²⁸

2. Cultural Traditions of the Batak Angkola Community

According to the ceremony of building and entering a new house in the Batak Angkola community, specifically during the ritual of *panaek bukkulan*, a mystical ambiance able to potentially blur the lines of faith and belief was observed. The act of placing several objects in certain parts of the house to be built seems like a ritual for people who adhere to animist teachings. This practice in Islam can be considered as *syirik*, not in line with sharia, because it is interpreted as an offering to supernatural beings.

This observation was emphasized as the power of Allah was capable of being conditionally transferred to specific sacred objects. In this case, the tradition was passed down

²⁶ Interviews with Batak Angkola traditional leaders, Mursal Sitompul and Drs.H. Agus Salim Hasibuan, North Padangsidempuan, September 30, 2022.

²⁷ Pandapotan Nasution, *Adat Budaya Mandailing Dalam Tantangan Zaman* (Medan: Forkala, 2005), 80.

²⁸ Abdul Kadir Riyadi, *Antropologi Tasawuf: Wacana Manusia Spiritual Dan Pengetahuan* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2014), 4.

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through generations and was continuous till the modern era. During *panaek bukkulan*, homeowners often started construction assembly by using wood or special steel beams with shooting nails till the installation of the roof. From this context, ceremonial and ritualistic elements were commonly observed in the tradition known as *naek bukkulan*, which was part of the cultural sequence of *pajonjong bagas*. Therefore, a mixture of cultural and religious teachings was found, including the recitation of the *azan* and the belief that events were unable to be carried out as planned without offerings and ritual items such as sugarcane, bananas, coconuts, palm sugar, and chayote.²⁹ This demonstrated that the group of workers involved always lacked punctuality and encountered several procedural shortcomings.



Figure 1. Installation of *naek bukkulan* attributes in the form of plants when raising the house *rabung* before being given a roof.

Different authorities were observed for many community figures in the village, including religious leaders, cultural personalities, youth and sports leaders, educators, as well as the district head and their entire staff. This explained that religious leaders, such as village clerics, formal school teachers, scholars, preachers, and students, upheld the aforementioned tradition without providing any response, study, or correction. These conditions were automatically legitimized, without any apparent contradiction to religious principles, violating monotheistic belief, Islamic jurisprudence, and Sufi ethics. According to the cultural figures, "Oppui sian bagas godang" was emphasized regarding the pile of objects presented as offerings, indicating that "this was our ancestral tradition no one was able to change."³⁰

²⁹ Interview with the new housekeeper Ali Murni Rangkuti, M.Ap, Sihitang Village, April 2023 in Sihitang Padangsidimpuan village.

³⁰ Interview with Sutan Tinggi Barani Nasution, April 8, 2023, Head of South Tapanuli Customary and Traditional Cultural Leaders in Padangsidimpuan City.

Subsequently, these objects prioritized the meanings and purposes interpreted according to their nature.

In previous eras, people were also able to understand and skillfully explain the philosophical values of the objects hung on the roof beam of a house being built. However, only a few people were presently capable of reading and interpreting the meaning of the rituals in the Batak Angkola community culture, including *pajonjong bagas*. In this case, the expectation of the mystical powers to be attached to the objects involved in *pajonjong bagas* was considered possible. These beliefs specifically exhibited the potential for *syirik*, whose proximity with faith was very close. Moreover, *syirik* was considered a partnership or companionship, with its interpretation in the concept of monotheism emphasizing the belief that Allah metaphysically shared attributes with other beings or objects. These objects included spirits or specific components as their locus, for example, having a true and correct mindset when a believer believed that Allah was Most Holy, exalted, and adored. This was accompanied by the belief that concoctions and objects had sacred powers and were exalted. Besides this, pure faith also became blurry and caused *syirik*.³¹

Based on these descriptions, the Muslim community of Batak Angkola was still involved in mysticism, specifically in Batang Angkola, known as the Veranda of Mecca in North Sumatra. This indicated the existence of many *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), as well as religious preachers and scholars, specifically during the *manaekkon bukkulan* tradition when building a new house. These parties practiced the tradition as a customary function without considering its forbidden nature, as it was passed down through generations for a considerable period. The belief and faith of an individual were also only justified by the integrity of their words, behavior, and patterns of worship. This demonstrated that religious fanaticism was distinguished while the elements of faith were intertwined with old cultural practices, regarding the observation of the Muslim Batak Angkola community. In this case, both religion and faith possessed confidence in their personalities, including beliefs about strength, abilities, and skills. For *panaek bukkulan*, a mystical connection was observed with the belief in *Nasonida*, emphasizing the existence of an unseen and powerful force.

The meaning of the *pajonjong bagas* tradition, especially the ritual in *naek bukkulan*, is only understood by *orang kaya* (*peñata hukum adat istiadat* or the traditional legal experts of the local community). Meanwhile, the majority of people just carry out the ritual without understanding its meaning, so there is a chance of causing *syirik*.

³¹ Fuad, "Tlatah Dan Tradisi Keagamaan Islam Mataraman."

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3. *Phenomenon of Masuk Bagas Naimbaru Tradition*

In the Bargot Hopong-Sibulele village, Batang Angkola sub-district, South Tapanuli, various houses were still built with traditional designs, and cultural rituals were preserved in their construction. Many of these structures also had walls of wooden planks and supports. Furthermore, the construction and design possessed various concepts, such as the models resembling buildings, bridges, etc. In this case, the implemented wooden planks were developed from different types of wood, including bania, maranti, modang, rasak, kapur, ingul, borti borti, etc. These materials were previously readily available from the nearby forest at the foot of Barisan Hill. Bamboo (*gogat*) was also applied as a wall for houses, with its split pieces woven together, modified, and shaped as planks.

From these descriptions, social relations showed the function and influence of the *dalihan natolu* tradition,³² emphasizing the three balancing stoves encompassing the Batak Angkola and other Batak communities. These stoves prioritized the three principles of kinship, namely Kahanggi, Mora, and Anakboru, which were interpreted as mutual help and the durable culture of cooperation from the village or the extended family. It also focused on *Dalihan Natolu*, in the context of *pajonjong bagas*, prioritizing the search for wood and other materials to build a family home. In addition, the principle of *martoktok bagas* was observed within the tradition, indicating that the construction of a normal-sized house in the village did not need much effort, due to the existence of firm family and community relations. During *martoktok bagas*, some family members were also commonly invited, specifically *kahanggi* and *anak boru*.³³ These members obtained wood raw materials to help the *suhut* (the host) build the house. On the first day of construction, a fuller and more numerous family were also invited, accompanied by neighbors and special builders. Since the people invited were present at the construction site, *marpokat pajonjong bagas* were then conducted at night.

During the *marpokat* (consolidation) event, *suhut* approximately provided the following speeches,

“Assalamu alaikum warahmatullohi wa barakatuh,”

This was accompanied by the opening words before the continuation of the following statements,

³² Armyn Hasibuan and Darwin Harahap, *Problematika Dan Strategi Naposo Nauli Bulung (Muda Mudi) Dalam Kegiatan Sosial Keagamaan Di Kota Padangsidempuan* (Banda Aceh: Bambu Kuning Utama, 2021).

³³ *Kahanggi* is a father's and mother's brother or line of nephews. While *anakboru* is the person who took our sister who is usually called *lae*.

“Ale koum sisolkot na hami parsangapi, mauli ate na sagodang godangna hami aturkon tu hamu sude namadung marlayang ni langka memenuhi jou jou nami di ari natuari i, Tu dongan naadong marhalangan, sai halangan na dengganma nian koum name! Antong sian haranii Madabu jait tu napotpot, na nida mata nida roha, artina baen na dipaluhutpeda koum sisolkot nasian jae dohot sian julu, ima salaho ni giot pajonjong bagas namadung dipaluhut parkakasna sian tor nasada tu tor nasada namartoktok hayu tiang, songoni bungkulan dohot manggaragaji baenon papan, songoni muse parkasayana paku, engsel ni pintu dohot jandelana songoni muse dohot silamoton madung luhut sedia painte koum sisolkot nami sasudena.

“Hami namangalubangido namalo, anggo mamantari lengna koum namido hami haropkon botimada. Anggo rencana nian leng di ari Sabtu atau Minggu nadonok naonma marsamo samo markopi tu bagasonma hita sudena di jam 07.30 WIB i. Tapi hami dokonpe songoni tu ompui do pangkolosan namalo mangatak dohot marnida songon mata mata ni honas. Tontu naron leng torukma jolo abara ni ompui dohot sude hita manarimo andung dohot holos namion,botima.

“Tangando botohon, ujungnai jari jari, Hata nadipardokonan isinaimada koum nami holos nami. Wassalamu ‘Alaikum Warahmatullohi Wa Barakatuh.”³⁴

The following statements emphasized the translation of the entire aforementioned speech,

“Assalamu ‘alaikum warahmatullohi wa barakatuh.

“Oh, our respected relatives, we thank you very much for all of you who have come to fulfill our invitation. For handai tolan who are unable to come, I hope it's a good obstacle. Precisely, this event is like the contents of the Batak Angkola proverb, ‘Jatuh jarum ke rumput lebat, walau tak dilihat mata, tapi terbayang di hati’ or ‘Like falling needles into dense grass, even though the eyes don't see it, but it's in the heart’.

The purpose of gathering the companions' families from downstream to upstream, inside and outside the village, is none other than wanting to build a house from which raw materials have been collected from one mountain to another, taking poles, as well as roof battens made of wood as well as other materials and tools such as nails, window hinges, moreover food and ready-to-eat dishes.

We only plan our family and hope to be able to finish. According to the plan, this Saturday and Sunday, I hope we come together to this house to have breakfast at 07.30. However, we ask the considerations from the customary leader or king at managing and seeing our problems. The king is like a pineapple, there are many spies, so he can understand our request and beg. Butohon has fingers at the end, words spoken please understand the contents of the message.”

³⁴ Recording results from Traditional Cultural Leaders of Sibulele village, Batang Angkola Sub-district, South Tapanuli (His Majesty Pian Hasibuan), Sunday October 09, 2022.

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This speech event was accompanied by the *pajonjong bagas* or house construction ceremony, where the host had prepared all the necessary materials, including various plant-based elements to be hung on the *reng rabung* close to the *seng*. Subsequently, these plants included the following, (1) sugarcane stems from the roots to the leaves, banana stems and leaves with a bunch of ripe fruits, (3) palm sugar, (4) coconut seedlings ranging from 35-100 cm in size, and (5) chayote.³⁵ According to a local traditional figure, the following statements were presented,

"This is a heritage and customary practice of our ancestors (ompu) that should be preserved."

From these descriptions, the plant materials, such as coconuts, bananas, sugarcane, and palm sugar symbolized prayers to Allah. This emphasized the wish for the future occupants of the house to be blessed with the characteristics represented by the plants.

4. *Mysticism Dimensions in Pajonjong Bagas*

In the process of *marmasuk bagas naimbaru*, various traditional ceremonies were still upheld. The principle of preserving the old and adopting the new/improved was also influenced by the teachings of traditional cultural kings. In this case, the principle was derived from Arabic concepts, specifically in the study of the Islamic jurisprudence concept (*fiqh*). This was due to the transmission of knowledge through generations by the traditional cultural kings. When these principles were adhered to and implemented, a renewal of formulations was often observed with a fresh concept. However, value adjustments were found when the principles were contaminated by hedonism and pragmatism. This condition commonly led to the younger generation emphasizing "*hepengdo namangatur*," which indicated money rules. The influence of modernization³⁶ and globalization was also capable of contaminating the community, specifically the younger generation, causing the portrayal of less respect for ancestral cultural traditions. This proved that the traditional customs in the Batak Angkola community were abandoned behind. Although the Muslim community in Batak Angkola was considered religious and non-religious at about 87% and 13%, mystical practices were still conducted, specifically during the tradition of building new houses. This involved the attribution of a spiritual essence to specific objects, due to their consideration as means for people to communicate with Allah.

³⁵ Observation during the house construction on July 21, 2021.

³⁶ Hakim Abdul Hamid, *Mengenal Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Ushul Fiqh dan Kaidah Fiqh: Terjemah Mabadi Awwaliyah* (Jakarta: Literasi Nusantara Abadi, 2021), 28.

During the *martoktok bagas* ceremony, the emergence of excessive reverence toward the traditional cultural kings was observed. This emergence often transformed into worship, with phrases such as the following, "*Tu ompui do pangkolosan namalo mangatak dohot marnida songon mata mata ni honas. Tontu naron leng torukma jolo abara ni ompui dohot sude hita manarimo andung dohot holos*". These phrases were capable of entering the realm of mysticism, equivalently praising the traditional cultural king as God. Furthermore, excessive reverence was often observed specifically among the people not sufficiently knowledgeable to differentiate between the outward expression and the inner essence. This indicated the happiness of the traditional cultural kings was likely dependent on the acquired praises. However, from a Sufi perspective, the praises and adulations provided by people were returned to Allah, leading to the following statement, "*lillahil hamd*" or "*al-hamdulillah*" (all praise is due to Allah).

In *pajonjong bagas* (house construction ceremony), the use of plant-based materials as symbols of goodness was also capable of leading the general community into the realm of mysticism, causing the consideration of plants as intermediaries. These conditions subsequently led to the following question, "*Why do people invoke Allah through the attributes of objects, even when the implemented figurative language/non-verbal expression and its implications were gradually leading people toward animism or dynamism?*". Similarly, the act of reciting the Azan during the placement of the *rabung* and *reng* was capable of pushing people towards *bid'ah* (innovations) and mysticism. In this case, the Azan was commonly misinterpreted as a means to summon blessings, ward off spirits, or counteract black magic.

5. Unraveling the Cultural Symbolism in Pajonjong Bagas

The advice of the traditional Batak Angkola indicated that their ancestral cultural traditions were endowed with symbolic language. These objects served as examples or imitations based on their qualities and conditions. Therefore, the skill to interpret the attributes of these objects as symbolic language was required. The banana stem and fruit, sugarcane, coconut sprouts, palm sugar, chayote, and the Azan also emphasized distinct symbolic interpretations. This proved that the capability to decipher the qualities and conditions of the objects upheld significance in the supplications and aspirations of people

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towards Allah. The objects also transcended mere offerings; representing natural cues to be articulated verbally and enabling the community to embrace the dynamics of communal life.³⁷

From these descriptions, coconut had many beneficial properties for humans, and its roots were used as a treatment for children with high fever. When pounded and mixed with ice, the plant was also applied as a compress to their heads and bodies. Moreover, the stem was commonly used as a bridge, accompanied by the development of various cabinets and more products. Coconut husk was also used as cooking fuel and a drumstick, with the midribs implemented for brooms, satay skewers, toothpicks, etc. This was accompanied by the use of the young leaves as wrappers for rice cakes, with the older and dried ones adopted as fuel without oil. Young coconuts were subsequently beneficial for boosting the immune system while the flesh of the ripe plant was implemented for coconut milk. The husk was also processed into gunny sacks, ropes, cooking fuel, etc. Furthermore, the shells were capable of being transformed into charcoal, with some of the raw materials used for producing cooking ladles. The most significant aspect of the coconut tree emphasized a metaphor for a married couple. For example, *"You both should be like coconut tree that is sayur matua bulung"*. This suggested that the couple should live together happily, akin to coconut trees, enduring without bearing fruit, standing tall in the sky, unfazed by winds, and swaying devoid of faltering.³⁸

Based on the philosophy of coconut sprouts, the house occupants provided benefits to the community in all aspects. By using the plant as a symbol, the couple occupants were provided with the following statement, *"You both should be like the coconut tree that is sayur matua bulung."* This indicated that the couple should live together happily till old age, akin to coconut trees, enduring without bearing fruit, standing tall in the sky, unfazed by winds, and swaying devoid of faltering.³⁹ Moreover, the sugarcane and palm sugar emphasized sweetness with slight differences. This was because the sweetness of sugarcane was natural and inherent, compared to the palm sugar that was processed. In this case, the symbolism of sugarcane and palm sugar was to encourage the house occupants to speak with sweet words, without offending or hurting other people. Being kind as the natural or crafted sweetness of sugarcane or palm sugar prioritized the happiness of people without hurting their feelings.⁴⁰

³⁷ Interviews with Batak Angkola traditional leaders, Mursal Sitompul and Drs.H. Agus Salim Hasibuan, North Padangsidempuan, September 30, 2022.

³⁸ Interview with traditional cultural figures at Tobat Village (Drs. H. Agus Salim Hasibuan) October 10, 2022

³⁹ Interview with traditional cultural figures at Tobat Village (Drs. H. Agus Salim Hasibuan) October 10, 2022

⁴⁰ Interview with traditional cultural figures at Tobat Village (Drs. H. Agus Salim Hasibuan) October 10, 2022

The segmented structure of the sugarcane also symbolized the stages of a happy life, encompassing sweet, medium, and non-edible top segments used for propagation. This indicated that the display of the plant stalk, including its roots, on the crossbeam of the new house represented diverse emotions within each life phase, symbolizing the periods of joy and challenges. From this context, the continuity of life amid varying circumstances was appropriately emphasized.

The nature of the banana stem was also commonly good, symbolizing that the house occupants should always have a calm state of mind, avoiding conflicts due to differing opinions. Similarly, the bunch of bananas symbolized the continuity of orderliness.⁴¹ Based on these descriptions, bananas and their fruits symbolized endurance under the scorching sun, resisting withering even when exposed to intense heat. The delightful taste of the fruits also remained present regardless of their ripe or unripe consumption. This mirrored the occupants of the new house regarding the navigation of challenges and joy, exhibiting persistence, resilience, and reliance on other people in social and community life. According to Sitompul, the community should entirely uphold ancestral cultural traditions, not in fragments or distortions from their original meanings. When the interpreters of the natural readings were unavailable or uninterested, multiple interpretations were also expected to emanate from the societal elements according to their desires. However, all interpretations should prioritize the symbolic significance of adhering to the enduring customs and traditions found in the ancestral records (*tumbaga holdings*) that were rich with profound and philosophical meanings.⁴²

Besides these descriptions, the chayote was also stored for a long time, symbolizing the expected longevity and enduring lives of the occupants. Based on this symbolism, the communal life of the occupants should continue for a long time, remaining steadfast, and not easily affected by harmful whispers from any source. This indicated that each family should be able to prioritize protection from various temptations.⁴³ When raising the bukkulan during the house construction, the Azan was then recited, with everyone remaining silent and listening attentively.⁴⁴ After the completion of this event, other activities were continuously revived, specifically the work on the upper part of the building.⁴⁵ This

⁴¹ Interview with traditional cultural figures at Tobat Village (Drs. H. Agus Salim Hasibuan) October 10, 2022

⁴² Interviews with Batak Angkola traditional leaders, Mursal Sitompul and Drs. H. Agus Salim Hasibuan, on September 30, 2022.

⁴³ Interview with Batak Angkola traditional leader, Mursal Sitompul on September 30, 2022.

⁴⁴ Observation when H. Muhammad Ariro Siregar's family built a house.

⁴⁵ Interview traditional cultural leader, Drs. H. Dahler Siregar on October 12, 2022.

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suggested that the presence of Azan was similar to summoning people for congregational prayer, directing them towards sacred objects of value. Despite its auditory call to goodness, the symbol still embodied the multiple meanings represented by various plants, collectively mirroring their role in prompting group prayer.

According to the *marmasuk bagas naimbaru* rituals, several ceremonial practices of the Batak Angkola community were observed when entering a new house, such as the *tepung tawar* ceremony combined with a thanksgiving tahlilan event. In these rituals, the initial process involved seeking auspicious days from the traditional elders preparing and sprinkling *borgo borgo*,⁴⁶ in various corners of the house. This action was believed to ward off the evil spirits that often provided heat and conflicts between husband and wife as the house occupants. However, coconut milk symbolically represented the sign of coolness that should accompany the newlyweds. Regarding all the symbols presented, several people were still likely to misinterpret the representation of various plants, such as coconut and its milk, banana, sugarcane, palm sugar, chayote squash, etc. Each of these items also served as a kind of text intended to provide meaning to the occupants. Although the possession of monotheism intention was necessary for religion to purify Allah from any resemblance (*tasybih*), specific Sufi beliefs, such as the philosophical Sufism previously developed in the archipelago,⁴⁷ still incorporated the concept of "*tanzih*." This concept demonstrated that the goodness of Allah manifested in nature.⁴⁸ The local culture also acquired mystical nuances due to its harmonization with the previous teachings of Sufi philosophical monotheism.⁴⁹ In this case, the culture developed with a sense of mysticism, and the belief within the existence of *Haqq Ta'a* was related to the native known as *Nasonida*.

C. Conclusion

In conclusion, the sequence of traditional ceremonies in *pajonjong bagas*, encompassing rituals such as *martoktok bagas* and *marmasuk bagas naimbaru*, encompassed

⁴⁶Coconut milk *borgo borgo*, made from coconut milk, rice flour, enough palm sugar, chopped old half coconut and salt to taste, stirred and put into the fists, it has two functions, namely 1. when consumed raw, don't boil it as a *wasilah* for traditional peacefulness. 2. If it is cooked, it is usually used in addition to the usual consumption, at the wedding ceremony it is a *silua* (souvenir) from anakboru of the host's daughter or sister. Interview with Baginda Lela Harahap, Traditional Leader, September 2022

⁴⁷ Humaidi, "Mystical-Metaphysics: The Type of Islamic Philosophy in Nusantara in the 17th-18th Century," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 27, no. 1 (July 2019): 90, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v27i1.5438>.

⁴⁸Seyyed Ahmad Fazeli, "The System of Divine Manifestation in The Ibn 'Arabian School of Thought," *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 1, no. 2 (December 2011): 174–75, <https://doi.org/10.20871/kpjipm.v1i2.15>.

⁴⁹ Ismail Fahmi Arrauf Nasution and Miswari, "Rekonstruksi Identitas Konflik Kesultanan Peureulak," *Paramita - Historical Studies Journal* 27, no. 2 (2017): 168–81, <https://doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v27i2.11159>.

activities imbued with mystical dimensions. One of the performed rituals also involved the arrangement of coconut and its milk, bananas, sugarcane, palm sugar, chayote, etc. This indicated that each of these plant elements significantly functioned as a symbolic reminder, for the household residents to uphold virtue. Furthermore, coconut represented being beneficial to fellow family members and the community in every dimension, with bananas symbolizing a sense of calmness in the heart and fostering orderliness among the occupants. This was accompanied by the symbolization of sugarcane and palm sugar, which emphasized a sweet disposition in every situation, enduring all emotions in the course of life with fortitude. Chayote also symbolized the resilience of the family, with coconut milk always spreading coolness. From these results, the rituals conducted contained the potential for negative aspects and caused *syirik* (polytheism) when the meanings were forgotten.

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