

# Uncovering the Meaning of Flower Bathing Ritual in Javanese Kliwonan Culture

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the flower bathing tradition in the *Kliwonan* ritual of Rawameneng Village as a fusion of Islamic teachings, Javanese mysticism, and ancestral reverence. This tradition serves as a means of spiritual purification, strengthens social solidarity, and preserves cultural heritage amidst the challenges of modernity. The study employs a qualitative approach, utilising data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document studies. The data were analysed using a descriptive-analytical method to uncover the relationship between education levels, gender participation, and generational roles in the performance of this ritual. The findings indicate that education levels influence how individuals perceive and participate in the *Kliwonan* tradition. Those with lower levels of education tend to preserve the tradition as a sacred heritage without reinterpretation, while highly educated individuals act as facilitators who bridge the tradition with modern Islamic understandings. Gender also plays a significant role, with men leading prayers and managing logistical arrangements, while women safeguard the sustainability of the tradition by transferring knowledge to the next generation. The implications of this study include the adaptation of the tradition through digital technology to engage the diaspora and the integration of traditional values into local education to maintain its relevance in the modern era. This research offers an original contribution by identifying the role of the diaspora in preserving traditions through digital platforms, an aspect rarely discussed in previous studies. Moreover, the findings expand insights into how local traditions can endure by combining cultural values, spirituality, and modern adaptation strategies. This study provides added value to the fields of religious and cultural studies, particularly in understanding the role of tradition as a medium for social resilience and cultural identity amidst changing times.

**Keywords:** Ancestral Reverence; Cultural Anthropology; Flower Bath Ritual; Javanese Traditions; Social Solidarity.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country renowned for its cultural diversity, comprising numerous ethnic groups, languages, and religions (Cassier, 1990). This diversity has fostered a rich cultural tapestry, with each ethnic group upholding unique traditions and practices. These cultural expressions manifest in both profane elements, such as traditional architecture and attire, and sacred rituals performed at specific times in response to certain phenomena (Clifford Geertz, 1992; Susanto, 1987). Among these, the Javanese people are particularly notable for their enduring commitment to preserving cultural heritage, including traditional ceremonies and rituals that have been passed down through generations.

Koentjaraningrat, in *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi*, highlights that culture is a product of human creativity and shared societal practices. Beyond visible artifacts like monuments and dances, culture also encompasses symbolic acts and traditions that carry profound meanings. Symbols, as emphasized by Clifford Geertz (2013), serve as vessels for transcendent meanings, representing both tangible and intangible beliefs within a society. These symbols are crucial in maintaining the continuity of cultural traditions, which act as a medium for social communication and interaction (Koentjaraningrat, 2015).

Traditions, as part of cultural heritage, play a significant role in maintaining community identity. Sztompka (2007) describes traditions as intentional legacies preserved across generations, often serving as a bridge between the past and the present. In Indonesia, this continuity is evident in sacred rituals such as the flower bath, a practice deeply embedded in Javanese culture. Traditionally, flower baths are performed during pivotal moments, such as seven-month pregnancy ceremonies or the cleansing of heirlooms. These rituals are imbued with symbolic meanings of purification and renewal, often conducted during sacred occasions or Islamic holidays (Fashri, 2007).

The social structure of Javanese society, rooted in animistic beliefs, continues to influence contemporary practices. Clifford Geertz (2013) observed that Javanese rituals often reflect a blend of animistic traditions and Islamic values, as seen in the slametan ceremony, a communal ritual aimed at achieving harmony and protection. Similarly, in Rawameneng Village, the flower bath is part of the Kliwonan tradition, performed every Friday night Kliwon. This tradition combines the Islamic significance of Friday as a sacred day with the Javanese reverence for Kliwon in the traditional calendar (Sztompka, 2007). These rituals highlight the community's effort to harmonize religious and cultural values.

Existing literature has extensively discussed Javanese rituals, such as slametan and flower baths, in general terms. However, there is limited research that specifically examines the symbolic and social dimensions of the flower bath ritual within the context of the Kliwonan tradition in Rawameneng Village. Previous studies have yet to explore how this ritual functions as a cultural bridge between Islamic and Javanese values or how it contributes to social cohesion and cultural preservation in a rapidly modernizing society. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a more focused and nuanced investigation (Hosseini Nasr, 1994).

To address this gap, the present study aims to analyze the processes and symbolic meanings of the flower bath ritual in Rawameneng Village's Kliwonan tradition. By employing a phenomenological approach, this research seeks to

uncover how the tradition integrates Islamic and Javanese values while strengthening community bonds. Furthermore, it will explore the ongoing relevance of this ritual in contemporary society, contributing to a deeper understanding of its role in cultural preservation.

This study hypothesizes that the flower bath ritual in the Kliwonan tradition serves not only as an act of purification but also as a symbolic representation of the community's cultural identity and spiritual aspirations. The ritual's continuity is believed to be driven by its ability to fulfill both spiritual and social needs, acting as a medium for ancestral veneration, social solidarity, and resistance against cultural homogenization. Additionally, the integration of Islamic values with Javanese customs enhances the ritual's acceptance and relevance, ensuring its sustainability as a cultural practice (Muqoyyin, 2013). By addressing these aspects, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the interplay between religious beliefs and local traditions in the context of modern cultural dynamics.

## METHOD

This study investigates the flower bath ritual within the Kliwonan tradition in Rawameneng Village, Blanakan Subdistrict, Subang Regency. Rawameneng Village was selected as the research site due to its unique preservation of the Kliwonan tradition, which integrates Islamic teachings with Javanese cultural practices (Pals, 2011). Unlike similar rituals in other regions, the flower bath in Rawameneng involves distinct symbolic elements, such as the specific types of flowers and prayers used, which highlight its cultural and spiritual significance. This uniqueness provides a compelling context for exploring how the tradition reflects the fusion of religion and culture while fostering social cohesion within the community.

The research employs a qualitative-descriptive design with a phenomenological approach to delve deeply into participants' subjective experiences and interpretations of the ritual (Sugiyono, 2018). This approach is particularly relevant for uncovering the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of the flower bath ritual, as it prioritizes understanding the participants' lived experiences. By focusing on the ritual's meanings and its role in community life, the phenomenological method bridges the gap between traditional practices and modern interpretations, making it a suitable framework for this study.

The participants in this study were carefully selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the ritual. Ten key informants, including traditional leaders, elders, and active participants, were chosen based on their involvement in performing and preserving the Kliwonan tradition. The informants represent diverse backgrounds, encompassing both men and women aged 30 to 70 years, with varied roles such as ritual leaders, organizers, and attendees. This diversity provides a holistic perspective on the ritual's social and cultural significance.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation (Bungin, 2010). The semi-structured interviews were guided by a well-designed framework that included questions about the ritual's process, symbolic meanings, and its social functions. These interviews allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives freely.

Observations of the ritual were carried out systematically using a structured checklist to document the sequence of events, participant interactions, and the tools used. Complementary documentation, such as photographs and historical records, was also gathered to enrich the analysis with contextual insights.

The analysis of the data followed a structured process. Initially, raw data from interviews, observations, and documentation were reduced and organized to retain only relevant information (Melong, 2007). This data was then categorized into themes such as symbolism, social dynamics, and religious integration. The phenomenological analysis focused on interpreting participants' narratives to uncover deeper meanings and link them to broader cultural and spiritual contexts. The final stage of analysis involved synthesizing these findings to draw conclusions about the ritual's role in preserving cultural identity, fostering community solidarity, and integrating Islamic and Javanese values.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. *The Meaning of the Kliwonan Ritual as an Expression of Gratitude*

The Kliwonan ritual in Rawameneng Village is a tradition rich in symbols and cultural values, reflecting the community's gratitude to God for the safety and blessings they have received. This tradition is identified as a form of slametan (a traditional Javanese communal feast), which emphasises collective prayer and the presentation of tumpeng as the main symbol of gratitude.



**Figure 1. Tumpeng as a symbol of slametan**

Figure 1 depicts *tumpeng*, a traditional cone-shaped dish that serves as a central element in the *slametan* ritual. *Tumpeng* is made of yellow or white rice, symbolising the pinnacle of hope for the community's blessings and prosperity. It is surrounded by various side dishes such as roasted chicken, eggs, vegetables, and sambal (a traditional Indonesian chilli paste), each carrying its own symbolism.

Table 1: Key components in tumpeng presentation

Tumpeng Element	Symbolism	Cultural Explanation
Cone-shaped rice	Summit of prosperity	Represents the community's pinnacle of hope for happiness and blessings.
Roasted chicken	Family harmony	Symbolises familial welfare and harmony.
Other side dishes	Social solidarity	Reflects the spirit of sharing and togetherness within the community.

In *slametan* traditions, *tumpeng* serves not only as a dish but also as a medium for expressing gratitude to God. Its conical shape symbolises a mountain, representing spirituality and a bridge between humans and the Divine. The surrounding side dishes signify social harmony and a shared desire to foster community spirit (Sumandiyo Hadi, 2006). The presentation of *tumpeng* also aims to create a sense of togetherness. The distribution of *tumpeng* is carried out equitably among all ritual participants, regardless of social status, symbolising solidarity and unity within the community. Consequently, *tumpeng* plays an integral role in the implementation of *slametan*, reinforcing both the spiritual and social meanings of the *Kliwonan* tradition in Rawameneng Village.

The ritual begins with collective prayers led by a *lebe* (a religious leader), expressing the community’s gratitude for the blessings received and seeking divine protection. The cone-shaped *tumpeng* symbolises the community’s peak aspirations for prosperity. This dish also acts as a medium for gathering all societal levels, transcending social or economic boundaries. The interactions during the preparation and execution of the ritual foster strong solidarity among community members. The presence of all societal layers demonstrates how this tradition strengthens social ties while emphasising inclusivity values (Eliade, 1959).

The *Kliwonan* tradition in Rawameneng Village is not only an expression of gratitude but also a crucial medium for maintaining unity and harmony within the community. The symbolic role of *tumpeng* bridges spiritual and social values, while the active involvement of all community members fosters robust solidarity. Thus, this tradition serves as a strong foundation for preserving cultural values and communal togetherness.

2. Honouring Ancestors as the Core of the Kliwonan Tradition

The *Kliwonan* tradition in Rawameneng Village serves as a medium for honouring ancestors who are believed to play a significant role in bestowing blessings and protection. During an interview, Bapak Talim explained:

“Mau ne wis keceluk, sedurung bapak meninggal sering kliwonan sekie diterusna ning anak putu ne, kaya wis kewajiban.”

(“It has long been recognised; before father passed away, he often performed *kliwonan*, and now it is passed down to his children and grandchildren as if it has become a duty.”) (Talim, Personal Communication, February 15, 2021).



**Figure 2. Villagers praying at ancestral graves**

Figure 2 illustrates the people of Rawameneng Village gathering to pray at ancestral graves as part of the *Kliwonan* ritual. This activity demonstrates profound respect for ancestors, who are regarded as the spiritual guardians of the community. The collective prayers, led by a *lebe* (religious leader), include the recitation of Qur'anic verses and supplications for safety, blessings, and protection for families and the broader community.

The performance of this ritual at ancestral graves reflects the Javanese cultural value of harmony, maintaining relationships with ancestors, the environment, and God. The presence of all community members, from the older generation to the youth, underscores the importance of social solidarity within this tradition (Eliade & M. Kitagawa, 1973). Beyond its spiritual dimension, the ritual fosters social cohesion through gathering and shared experiences.

The *Kliwonan* ritual is passed down through generations, ensuring its preservation amidst changing times. The elder generation actively imparts the moral and spiritual values embedded in this tradition to the younger generation, fostering cultural continuity. Sacred locations, such as ancestral graves, become meaningful sites for the ritual, rich in historical significance. The community believes that ancestors serve as spiritual protectors who provide blessings, making attendance at these sacred spaces an act of respect and a commitment to maintaining harmony between the living and the deceased.

The prayers recited during this ritual hold significant meaning, regarded as a moral responsibility to honour the contributions of ancestors. These prayers act as a medium for seeking blessings and guidance from God through the intercession of ancestors. By involving all community members, the tradition strengthens both social and spiritual bonds within the community.

Through the *Kliwonan* ritual, the people of Rawameneng Village not only sustain their ancestral heritage but also affirm their cultural identity. This practice serves as a bridge between past and present generations, ensuring that local wisdom endures (Subagya, 1981). The tradition also underscores the importance of ancestors in spiritual life, with the prayers offered reinforcing the community's connection to God. By engaging all societal layers, this ritual fortifies communal harmony and remains a vital collective identity amidst modern challenges.



3. The Meaning of Mandi Kembang in the Kliwonan Tradition

The *mandi kembang* (flower bath) ritual in the *Kliwonan* tradition of Rawameneng Village is a practice passed down through generations and performed every *Jumat Kliwon* (a specific Friday in the Javanese calendar). During this ritual, participants use water mixed with *bunga tujuh rupa* (seven types of flowers), scented oil, and special incantations recited by the community’s elders or spiritual leaders (Prihantini, 2020). The ritual is conducted at midnight, following a series of prayers (*tahlil*) at the ancestral graves. The *mandi kembang* water is believed to have the power to spiritually cleanse, ward off misfortune, and fulfil personal aspirations. Most participants regard the blessings of their ancestors as intermediaries for their safety and health. Bapak Talim, a local elder, explained:

"Adus banyu kliwonan kan sebenere mah jaluk karomahe wong tua kula pribadi supaya keniataane kula apa sing diniati diijabah melalui karomahe bapak H Dagung."

("Bathing with water on Jumat Kliwon is essentially seeking the blessings of our ancestors, so our wishes may be fulfilled through the karomah [spiritual charisma] of our ancestor, Bapak H. Dagung.") (Talim, Personal Communication, February 15, 2021).

Table 3. Equipment for the *Mandi Kembang* Ritual

Equipment	Function
<i>Bunga tujuh rupa</i>	Symbol of diversity and a hope for blessings.
<i>Minyak wangi duyung</i>	Creates a sense of sanctity and inner tranquillity.
Bowl and water	Medium for soaking flowers and creating prayer water.
Soap	Symbolises physical cleansing.

As illustrated in Table 3, each piece of equipment has its distinct purpose. Once all items are prepared, the ritual continues with prayers led by a *lebe* (religious leader) or a respected local figure.



Figure 3: *Lebe* Reciting Prayers and Incantations

Figure 3 depicts a *lebe* reciting specific prayers and incantations to sanctify the flower water, which is later used for the *mandi kembang* ritual. These prayers

are central to the ceremony, as participants seek blessings and safety through the *karomah* of their ancestors, believed to be present during this sacred night.

The *mandi kembang* ritual is performed after the *tahlil* on *Jumat Kliwon*, symbolising personal purification. The flower water, imbued with prayers, serves as a symbolic tool for removing negative energy and bringing blessings. This ritual is seen as a form of spiritual communication with ancestors, who are believed to possess the *karomah* necessary to support the community's well-being.

The *mandi kembang* ritual in Rawameneng Village represents a harmonious blend of sacred symbols, traditions, and spiritual beliefs, reflecting the community's cultural and spiritual identity (Handayani & Ali, 2020). Key elements such as *bunga tujuh rupa* (seven types of flowers), scented oil, and water symbolise diversity, sanctity, and tranquillity. Combined with prayers led by community leaders, these elements create a sacred atmosphere, elevating the ritual into a profound spiritual practice. Conducted at midnight, a time deemed sacred in Javanese culture, the ritual provides an opportunity for introspection, spiritual cleansing, and connecting with God (Mattulada, 1997).

This specific timing highlights the community's commitment to preserving traditional values. Spiritual leaders, like the *lebe*, guide prayers and oversee the ritual, reinforcing spiritual leadership and communal unity. Their presence bridges the earthly and spiritual realms, enhancing the ritual's significance. The community's belief in the *karomah* (spiritual charisma) of ancestors underscores the ritual's spiritual depth. By honouring ancestors as intermediaries, participants seek blessings and protection, strengthening bonds between generations. The *mandi kembang* ritual serves as both a spiritual practice and a cultural cornerstone, preserving local traditions while fostering unity and shared identity. This enduring practice exemplifies the integration of faith and culture in navigating modern challenges (Koentjaraningrat, 1974).

Overall, the *mandi kembang* ritual is not merely a tradition but also a spiritual medium deeply integrated with local cultural values. It functions as a means to maintain social harmony, strengthen interpersonal bonds within the community, and instil gratitude and prayers for life's blessings. The integration of traditional beliefs with Islamic spiritual values is evident in the *mandi kembang* ritual, highlighting how Rawameneng's community combines ancestral reverence with spiritual practices. The flower water symbolises life and purification, reinforcing the belief that this tradition has both physical and spiritual benefits for its practitioners.

#### **4. Preserving the Kliwonan Tradition: Harmony Between Culture, Spirituality, and Modern Adaptation**

This study highlights the flower bathing ritual in the *Kliwonan* tradition of Rawameneng Village as a unique blend of Islamic teachings, Javanese mysticism, and ancestral reverence (Nimah & Wirawan, 2021). The tradition serves as a means of spiritual purification, strengthens social solidarity, and preserves cultural heritage. The findings indicate a significant relationship between education levels, gender participation, and generational roles in the implementation of this tradition. Adaptation through digital technology and integration of the tradition into local education has proven effective in ensuring its sustainability amidst the challenges of modernity (Adimihardja, 2007).



The relationship between education and participation in the *Kliwonan* ritual reveals that individuals with lower education levels tend to perceive the tradition as a sacred heritage that should remain unchanged. Meanwhile, those with higher education levels act as facilitators, bridging the tradition with modern Islamic understanding. This phenomenon can be explained by the broader access to information and the reflective capabilities of educated individuals in interpreting the tradition. Gender also plays a pivotal role, with men leading prayers and managing logistical arrangements, while women safeguard the tradition's sustainability through the transfer of knowledge (Abdullah, 2013). This illustrates that community involvement in the ritual is shaped not only by faith but also by deeply embedded social patterns and collective responsibilities.

The findings align with Geertz's (1960) study, which emphasises the role of education in shaping religious perspectives in Javanese-Islamic communities. Similarly, the research by Nasir (2019) and Sirait (2016) is relevant, particularly in highlighting how *slametan* (communal thanksgiving ceremonies) and *tahlilan* (Islamic communal prayers) foster symbolic communication that strengthens community solidarity. However, this study provides a novel contribution by identifying the uniqueness of the flower bathing ritual, such as the use of water and flowers as mediums for spiritual purification, resembling the practice of *ṭahārah* (purification in Islamic tradition) (Khan, 2020) and the purification systems in Butonese culture. Furthermore, this research underscores the role of the diaspora in preserving the tradition through digital media, a dimension rarely explored in previous studies.

The flower bathing ritual within the *Kliwonan* tradition holds profound meanings that reflect the harmony between Islamic principles and local traditions. Socially, the ritual enhances community cohesion through collective efforts, such as preparing *tumpeng* (a cone-shaped rice dish) and flower bathing materials. Spiritually, it serves as a bridge connecting individuals, their ancestors, and God, fostering intergenerational connections. For instance, the cross-gender and cross-age participation not only preserves the tradition but also strengthens the cultural identity of the Rawameneng community. The social and historical implications of these findings suggest that local traditions can effectively function as mediums for cultural resilience amidst the pressures of modernisation.

The *Kliwonan* ritual primarily functions to reinforce social bonds and cultural continuity. However, potential risks such as decreased youth participation due to urbanisation and modern lifestyle preferences pose a threat to its sustainability. Additionally, the commercialisation of the ritual may dilute its spiritual essence. Despite these challenges, adaptation through digitalisation and the integration of traditional values into local education have successfully preserved the ritual's relevance. Initiatives such as documenting the ritual on digital platforms also enable diaspora participation, maintaining their emotional connection to their homeland.

To ensure the sustainability of the *Kliwonan* tradition, strategic actions must be tailored to community needs. One essential step is integrating this tradition into local education through the development of culturally-based learning modules. These modules aim to introduce the spiritual and social values embedded in the *Kliwonan* tradition to younger generations, enabling them to understand its importance as part of their cultural identity. Additionally, empowering women is

crucial, given their roles as trainers and community organisers. Enhancing women's capacities in transferring knowledge across generations can more effectively ensure the tradition's continuity (Nuha & Nisak, 2020).

The use of digital technology also provides a significant solution for preserving the tradition in the modern era. Developing virtual platforms enables the sustainable documentation of the tradition while opening opportunities for diaspora participation. Through online communal prayers or educational content, community members living far from the village can remain connected to their traditions and origins. Furthermore, intergenerational dialogues must be facilitated to foster collective awareness about the importance of preserving the tradition. These discussions can serve as a platform for older and younger generations to exchange perspectives, bridge differences, and strengthen their sense of belonging to the *Kliwonan* tradition (Van Peursen, 1988).

Additionally, conducting comparative studies with other communities that have successfully preserved local traditions amidst modernity is a crucial step. Such approaches allow Rawameneng Village to adopt relevant preservation strategies, such as community-based tradition management or collaborations with cultural and educational institutions. By combining these efforts, the *Kliwonan* tradition can continue to thrive, remain relevant, and serve as a symbol of cultural harmony, spirituality, and societal adaptation in the face of changing times.

## CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted several critical findings regarding the Flower Bath Ritual and Tahlil Kliwonan in Rawameneng Village. The most significant finding is the diversity in the practice of the Kliwonan Ritual, where some participants engage in the flower bath ritual, while others use drinking water as a medium for prayer. This diversity reflects the community's adaptability, demonstrating how the tradition accommodates variations while preserving its core values. The flexibility of these practices underscores the resilience of the Kliwonan Ritual in maintaining its spiritual essence and social function, solidifying its role as a cornerstone of the village's cultural identity.

The research contributes to the study of local culture by providing a detailed exploration of the symbolic meanings and social functions of the Flower Bath Ritual. By employing a phenomenological approach, this study has successfully uncovered nuanced interpretations and deep-rooted values that are often overlooked in other methodologies. This approach not only sheds light on the ritual's spiritual and communal significance but also positions the study as a model for investigating similar traditions in other regions. Such a framework is invaluable for understanding the interplay between cultural practices and social cohesion.

However, this research has limitations, particularly in its geographic focus on Rawameneng Village, which may not represent similar traditions in other areas. Additionally, while the study provides rich descriptions and interpretations, it does not delve deeply into the socio-economic impacts of the tradition. Future research could expand by conducting comparative studies of similar rituals in diverse regions, exploring the economic and social implications of preserving such traditions. A combination of phenomenological and quantitative methods could

offer a more comprehensive perspective, particularly in assessing the economic benefits and broader societal effects of these cultural practices.

In conclusion, the Flower Bath Ritual and Tahlil Kliwonan represent a vital interplay between spiritual purification, ancestral reverence, and communal solidarity. The diversity in its practice highlights the community's capacity to adapt while preserving cultural integrity. By integrating shared responsibilities, inclusive participation, and modern adaptations, the tradition continues to thrive, ensuring its relevance amidst changing societal dynamics. This study not only illuminates the enduring significance of the Kliwonan Ritual in Rawameneng Village but also offers a framework for exploring and preserving local traditions in other cultural contexts. Through ongoing research and methodological innovation, future studies can further enrich our understanding of how such rituals contribute to cultural resilience and societal well-being.

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