

Lived Religion and Social Cohesion: Symbolic Meanings of Sa-uyunan Muharam in Sundanese Community

Agama dan Kohesi Sosial: Makna Simbolis Sa-uyunan Muharam dalam Masyarakat Sunda

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ABSTRAK

Tradisi Sa-uyunan Muharam merupakan fenomena unik dalam lanskap Islam Indonesia yang menunjukkan integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dengan kearifan budaya Sunda untuk membangun kohesi sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis makna simbolis tradisi Sa-uyunan Muharam dan mengkaji kontribusinya terhadap harmoni masyarakat Sunda. Riset ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi kualitatif dengan teori antropologi simbolik, konsep lived religion, dan teori memori kolektif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan 17 informan antargenerasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian mengungkap empat sistem simbolis utama: praktik ziarah sebagai kesinambungan spiritual, distribusi makanan sebagai simbol solidaritas, pawai obor sebagai cahaya iman dan persatuan, serta pembagian hadiah sebagai manifestasi keadilan kolektif. Filosofi sa-uyunan beroperasi melalui musyawarah, gotong royong, dan silaturahmi yang menciptakan integrasi sosial horizontal dan vertikal. Tradisi ini mendemonstrasikan model "lived religion institusional" dan "tradisionalisme adaptif" yang berkontribusi signifikan pada harmoni masyarakat sebagai mekanisme integrasi sosial multidimensi, penanda identitas kolektif, dan strategi ketahanan budaya.

Kata Kunci: Kohesi sosial; Lived Religion; Makna Simbolis; Komunitas Sunda; Sa-uyunan Muharram

ABSTRACT

The tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharam is a unique phenomenon in the Indonesian Islamic landscape that shows the integration of Islamic values with Sundanese cultural wisdom to build social cohesion. This research aims to analyze the symbolic meaning of the Sa-uyunan Muharam tradition and examine its contribution to the harmony of Sundanese society. This research uses a qualitative ethnographic approach with symbolic anthropological theory, the concept of lived religion, and collective memory theory. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with 17 intergenerational informants, and documentation. The results of the study reveal four main symbolic systems: the practice of pilgrimage as spiritual continuity, the distribution of food as a symbol of solidarity, the torch parade as the light of faith and unity, and the distribution of gifts as a manifestation of collective justice. The philosophy of sa-uyunan operates through deliberation, mutual cooperation, and friendship that creates horizontal and vertical social integration. This tradition demonstrates the models of "institutional lived religion" and "adaptive traditionalism" that contribute significantly to the harmony of society as a mechanism of multidimensional social integration, markers of collective identity, and strategies of cultural resilience.

Keywords: Lived religion; Sa-uyunan Muharram; Social Cohesion; Symbolic Meanings; Sundanese Community

INTRODUCTION

The month of Muharram occupies a special position in the Islamic calendar as a holy month that marks the beginning of the Hijri year (Rofiq 2024). The sacredness of this month is commemorated by Muslims around the world through a variety of traditions that reflect the characteristics of their respective local cultures (Aghaei 2004; Chelkowski 2010; Farchani et al. 2024; Husna and Maola 2023; Octaviana and Pujilestari 2024; Setiyono, Mubin, and Rizqi 2025). Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, shows a very rich diversity of religious practices in welcoming Muharam (Ambar, Jaelani, and Hidayat 2023). This diversity is manifested in various forms of traditions, ranging from Tabuik in West Sumatra, special commemorations in Aceh, to various rituals that develop in Java (Azra 2006; Ricklefs 2012).

In the diverse landscape of Muharam traditions in Indonesia, the Sundanese people in West Java have a unique religious practice called Sa-uyunan Muharam. This tradition shows an interesting phenomenon in combining Islamic values with local Sundanese wisdom. Etymologically, the term "Sa-uyunan" comes from the Sundanese word "sa-uyun" which means one voice or consensus, while "Muharram" refers to the holy month in Islam. The

combination of these two words describes the essence of tradition that emphasizes togetherness and social harmony in living Islamic values.

The unique characteristic of Sa-uyunan Muharam lies in its emphasis on the social-communal dimension, which distinguishes it from the Muharam tradition in other regions of Indonesia. While the Muharam tradition in other areas tends to focus on liturgical or historical aspects, Sa-uyunan Muharam emphasizes more on building social solidarity and harmony between citizens. This approach reflects Sundanese cultural values that prioritize harmony and mutual cooperation in community life.

However, academic studies of the Muharram tradition in Indonesia show a significant research gap. Previous studies have focused more attention on the Tabuik tradition in West Sumatra (Graves 2007; Wessing 1988) and religious practices in Java (Beatty, 1999; Woodward, 2011). Meanwhile, religious traditions in the context of Sundanese culture, including Sa-uyunan Muharam, have not received adequate attention from academics. In fact, the Sa-uyunan Muharam tradition offers a very interesting perspective on how Islam is lived and practiced in a local cultural context that emphasizes social harmonization.

This research gap is increasingly important to overcome given the relevance of the Sa-uyunan Muharam tradition in the plural Indonesian context. This research is motivated by the importance of understanding the dynamics of the relationship between religion and local culture in shaping the social cohesion of society. In the context of Indonesia's pluralism, the study of religious practices that promote social harmony has become highly relevant for contemporary discussions on religious moderation and tolerance (Bruinessen 2013; Erawadi and Setiadi 2024; Hefner 2000).

Recent research shows that religious practices in Indonesia that integrate local values with Islamic teachings contribute significantly to social stability and community cohesion (Azizul, Madi, and Basri 2025; Ridho et al. 2023; Setinawati et al. 2025). In this context, the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram, with its emphasis on cross-generational togetherness and social solidarity, offers a model of religious practice conducive to the development of a harmonious society. Although the literature on local Islam in Indonesia is quite developed, there is still a significant gap in the study of the Muharam tradition in the context of Sundanese culture, especially the Sa-uyunan Muharam tradition as a phenomenon that has unique characteristics in the Indonesian Islamic landscape.

Based on the background of the problems described above, this study formulates two main questions that will be the focus of the study. First, what is the symbolic meaning contained in the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram? Second, how do the philosophies and social functions of this tradition contribute to the harmony of Sundanese society? This research aims to explain the symbolic system in the Sa-uyunan Muharam tradition, analyze the underlying philosophy of togetherness, and uncover the contribution of this tradition to the social cohesion of Sundanese society.

Academically, this research is expected to enrich the treasure of studies on local Islam in Indonesia, especially in the context of Sundanese culture. The results of this study will provide theoretical contributions to the development of the concept of religious moderation and social harmony in a pluralistic society. Practically, this research can provide insight for policy makers in formulating community development strategies based on local wisdom and inclusive religious values.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is built on a theoretical foundation consisting of three main perspectives that complement each other and strengthen the analysis of the phenomenon of Sa-uyunan Muharram. These three perspectives were chosen based on their relevance to the complexity of the phenomenon studied, namely the symbolic dimension, religious practices in daily life, and aspects of collective memory in society.

The first theoretical foundation is the theory of symbolic anthropology developed by Clifford Geertz (1973) Geertz understands culture as a system of symbols that are interpreted and lived by society. In Geertz's view, cultural symbols function as "thick descriptions" that

contain layered and complex meanings, rather than simple representations of social reality. This theory emphasizes that to understand a cultural practice, researchers must be able to uncover the various layers of meaning hidden behind the symbols that appear on the surface. In the context of Sa-uyunan Muharram, every element of ritual such as pilgrimage, torch parade, food distribution, and gift-giving can be understood as a symbol that is full of meaning and reflects the worldview of the Sundanese-Muslim community. This approach allows researchers to not only describe those practices externally but also uncover the underlying system of meaning.

The second theoretical foundation is the concept of "lived religion" developed by Robert Orsi (2005) and Meredith McGuire (2008). In contrast to traditional approaches that focus on religious texts or doctrines, lived religion emphasizes how religion is practiced and lived in people's daily lives. This concept recognizes that religious practices do not always follow the official format established by religious authorities but are often adapted to the local context and practical needs of the community. The concept of lived religion is very relevant to understand how Islamic values in the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram are not only understood textually or doctrinally but are lived through concrete and contextual socio-cultural practices. This approach allows researchers to understand the dynamics of adaptation and negotiation between universal religious teachings and local cultural values. Through the perspective of lived religion, the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram can be understood as an authentic manifestation of the appreciation of Islam that is not separate from the Sundanese socio-cultural context.

The third theoretical foundation is the theory of collective memory developed by Maurice Halbwachs (1992). This theory explains how societies maintain identity and continuity through the practice of remembering together. Halbwachs argues that memory is not only an individual phenomenon, but also a social phenomenon that is shaped and maintained by groups of people through collective practices. In the context of Sa-uyunan Muharram, the ritual of pilgrimage to the graves of ancestors, teachers, and local figures can be understood as a collective memory practice that connects the past with the present. This practice serves to strengthen social ties between members of the community and transmit important values to the younger generation. The theory of collective memory helps to uncover how the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram plays a role in maintaining the cultural continuity and identity of the Sundanese-Muslim community.

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives allows for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the Sa-uyunan Muharram tradition. The approach of symbolic anthropology provides a framework for uncovering the symbolic meanings contained in the practice of tradition. The concept of lived religion helps to understand how this tradition is practiced and lived in the context of the daily life of the Sundanese people. Meanwhile, the theory of collective memory reveals the function of tradition in maintaining the identity and continuity of the community.

This integrative approach is in line with recent trends in the study of religion that emphasize the importance of understanding religion as a phenomenon embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts (Lynch 2007; Woodhead and Heelas 2000). Contemporary research shows that religious traditions that combine ritual practices with local cultural values have an important role in maintaining social harmony in a pluralistic society (Susanto 2025; Wisarja and Sudarsana 2023).

In the context of Southeast Asia, the lived religion approach has proven effective in analyzing how Muslim communities adapt religious practices to local contexts without losing Islamic identity (Formichi 2020; Nasriandi, Pajarianto, and Makmur 2023). The theoretical framework used in this study is expected to contribute to the development of a deeper understanding of local Islamic dynamics in Indonesia, especially in the context of Sundanese culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic design to capture the deep meaning of the Sa-uyunan Muharam tradition. This study was conducted over approximately three months (May–July 2025), spanning preliminary fieldwork and rapport-building, participatory observation of the full Sa-uyunan Muharam cycle on 1 Muharam 1447 H, and intensive in-depth interviews with data triangulation (June–July 2025). The ethnographic approach was chosen for its ability to understand cultural phenomena from the perspective of participants, revealing the symbolic and philosophical values embedded in tradition. The research location was determined in three mosque prosperity council (DKM) neighborhoods Sindangsari, Patahanan District, and Lumbung in Sukakarta Village, Jatiwaras District, Tasikmalaya Regency, West Java. This site was selected because it is the institutionalized epicenter of the Sa-uyunan Muharam tradition, where collaboration among three DKM provides rich social dynamics for study.

Research informants were determined using purposive sampling with strict criteria: direct involvement in the implementation of traditions, in-depth knowledge of the history and meaning of traditions, and cross-generational representation across social roles. Based on these criteria, 17 informants were obtained, consisting of religious leaders, community leaders, activity coordinators, DKM chairmen, RT chairmen, and representatives of mothers, youth, and children. This diverse composition aims to obtain a holistic perspective on the tradition from various social standpoints and to capture the dynamics of cultural transmission and the evolving meaning of traditions over time.

Data collection was carried out through three complementary techniques. First, participatory observation during the full series of Sa-uyunan Muharam activities on 1 Muharam 1447 H (2025), covering all stages from preparation and pilgrimage to prize distribution, allowing researchers to directly experience the atmosphere and social dynamics. Second, in-depth interviews with all key informants using semi-structured guidelines designed to explore historical aspects, symbolic meaning of each ritual, underlying philosophy, and the social function of tradition in community life. Third, documentation through photos, videos, and field notes to complement and strengthen observational and interview data.

Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), comprising three components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The process began with verbatim transcription of all interviews to ensure accuracy, followed by iterative coding to identify key themes and ensure consistency and depth of analysis. Data validity was ensured through multiple triangulation strategies. Source triangulation involved comparing data across informants to verify consistency of information. Methodological triangulation integrated findings from observation, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was conducted through confirmation of findings with key informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with participants' own understanding of their tradition.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Sa-uyunan Muharram Tradition

The tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram carried out by the three Mosque Prosperity Councils (DKM) (Sindangsari-Patahanan-Lumbung) in Sukakarta Village, Jatiwaras District, Tasikmalaya Regency is an evolution of religious practices that have been going on since the era of previous figures but have undergone institutionalization and elaboration since 2021. According to Ustad ZN, one of the senior religious figures, this tradition was initially carried out separately by each DKM with the main focus on pilgrimage activities. The transformation into a joint activity occurred at the initiation of cross-DKM deliberations with the aim of strengthening the Islamic *ukhuwah* and giving a lively welcome to the Islamic New Year (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

The series of Sa-uyunan Muharram traditions consists of five main stages that are meaningfully and temporally interrelated. First, an individual pilgrimage to the graves of the parents and *karuhun* (ancestors) of each family is carried out in the morning. This activity is

private and emphasizes the aspect of *birrul walidain* (devotion to the elderly) as well as prayers for the deceased soul.

Second, a collective pilgrimage to the graves of the teachers is carried out after the Asr prayer. This activity involved all traditional participants and was led by religious leaders. Guru pilgrimage has a special meaning in the context of Sundanese culture which upholds the concept of "teachers are second parents." As explained by Al, a young man, "I made a pilgrimage to the teachers in this neighborhood to pray for the teachers of our teachers who are still there as a form of *my destiny* and respect, hopefully it will be the inheritance of the benefits of knowledge." (Personal communication, June 27, 2025)

Third, Maghrib congregational prayers at DKM Patahunan which were followed by food distribution. This activity marks the transition from contemplative pilgrimage activities to the social dimension of tradition. The distribution of food is not just a ritual of eating together but contains the meaning of alms and sharing sustenance. According to IH, one of the mothers, the distribution of food as a form of alms, especially in Islam in the month of Muharram, must increase alms." (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

Fourth, the torch parade from the Patahunan DKM to the Lumbung DKM with a pilgrimage stop at the tomb of Raden Indraratuna. The torch parade is the most visual element of this tradition and presents a rich symbolic dimension. The torch not only serves as a practical light, but also symbolizes the light of faith and the unity of the people. NA, a young woman, explained that "The torch parade is held as a form of joy and welcome for the arrival of the month of Muharram as the Islamic New Year" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

Fifth, the distribution of prizes at DKM Lumbung which closes the series of traditions. This activity creates an atmosphere of joy and ensures the active participation of the younger generation. IA, a child who was a participant, stated that he was very happy with this activity because "this is what we have been waiting for" from the entire series of activities (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

Symbolic Meanings in the Sa-uyunan Muharram Tradition

A symbolic analysis of the Sa-uyunan Muharram tradition reveals four main symbolic systems that are interrelated in shaping the religious worldview of the community. This symbol system forms a coherent totality of meaning within the framework of Islamic values and Sundanese culture.

Pilgrimage Symbols: Spiritual Continuity and Reverence

Pilgrimage in Sa-uyunan Muharram serves as a symbol of spiritual continuity connecting three generations: ancestors, teachers, and descendants. The practice of pilgrimage to parental graves activates the value of *birrul walidain*, one of the fundamental principles of Islam. As Ustad ZN explained, it is "a form of *birrul walidain*, teaching children and youth to respect their parents and pray for those who have passed away" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

Figure 1. Pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Elderly in the Tradition of *Sa-uyunan* Muharram



Source: Personal documentation, 2025.

As seen in Figure 1, people gather in the cemetery to pray together at the graves of their parents not only as tribute to ancestors, but as a learning space for younger generations about intergenerational respect through prayer. The symbolic dimension of this pilgrimage operates

across temporal, spiritual, and social levels simultaneously: bridging past and present, serving as a medium of moral reflection, and transmitting religious values across generations.

The pilgrimage to the teacher's tomb adds an epistemological dimension. Teachers in Islamic tradition are seen as heirs of the prophet (*waratsah al-anbiya*) who transmit knowledge and wisdom. This practice actualizes *ta'dhim* (respect) that transcends the boundaries of life and death. As Ustad AG noted, "we can be like this because of teachers, have knowledge even if a little thanks to our teachers" (Personal communication, June 29, 2025). As shown in Figure 2, the congregation gathers to chant prayers together, affirming knowledge as a heritage that must be preserved.

Figure 2. Pilgrimage to the Teacher's Tomb in the Tradition of *Sa-uyunan* Muharram



Source: Personal documentation, 2025.

The pilgrimage to local figure Raden Indrataruna adds historical and cultural legitimacy. Trusted as part of the Tasikmalaya Regency government structure in the past, he became an ideal leadership symbol. This pilgrimage carries the meaning of *ngalap berkah* (seeking blessings) and hope that pilgrims will follow exemplary leadership. As Ustad ZN stated, "the most important thing is to pray" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025). As shown in Figure 3, pilgrims gather at the graves of local figures who affirm the pilgrimage simultaneously as historical, spiritual, and socio-cultural.

Figure 3. Pilgrimage to the Tomb of Local Leader Raden Indrataruna in the Tradition of *Sa-uyunan* Muharam



Source: Personal documentation, 2025.

Symbol of Food Distribution: Solidarity and Equity

Food distribution in Sa-uyunan Muharram goes beyond fulfilling physical needs. Symbolically, food functions as a medium of social solidarity and equal distribution of sustenance. Turner (1969) explained that communal food distribution creates a "community" transcending normal social hierarchies. In this context, it actualizes Islamic principles of sharing. YN, one of the mothers, described it as a "symbol of sharing sustenance we must not be selfish, we must feel happiness together" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025). The distribution also carries a sacred dimension: Muharram as one of the glorious months (*asyhur al-hurum*) makes it ideal for multiplying good deeds, giving religious legitimacy to social solidarity. These findings align with research showing food distribution in Indonesian Islamic traditions serves as socio-economic redistribution that strengthens cohesion (Ibrahim et al. 2023; Maiseptian et al. 2023). As shown in Figure 4, the community jointly received food prepared as alms from the community, signifying togetherness and social attachment

Figure 4. Distribution of Food in the Tradition of *Sa-uyunan* Muharram



Source: Personal documentation, 2025.

Torch Parade Symbol: Light of Faith and Unity

The torch parade is the most spectacular element of Sa-uyunan Muharram. In Islamic tradition, light (*nur*) carries rich symbolic connotations revelation, guidance, and faith as reflected in Surah An-Nur (35:35). The torch thus becomes a physical representation of spiritual light. RW, a young participant, interpreted it as "symbol of the light of faith to welcome the Islamic New Year" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025), affirming two dimensions: spiritual (faith dispelling darkness) and temporal (marking transition to the Hijri new year). Furthermore, hundreds of torches moving together create a visual metaphor of unity, each individual light combining into a far greater collective illumination, highly relevant to pluralistic Sundanese society's pursuit of cohesion through religious practice. As shown in Figure 5, all the pilgrims carried torches and walked hand in hand along the village road

Figure 5. Torch Parade in the *Sa-uyunan* Muharram Tradition



Source: Personal documentation, 2025

Symbol of Prize Sharing: Justice and Joy

The distribution of prizes for all participants who participated in the event from parents to children closed the series of Sa-uyunan Muharram traditions with symbols of justice and joy. In a sociological context, the gift serves as a redistribution mechanism that ensures all children, regardless of the family's economic status, can experience the same happiness. This reflects the principle of social justice (*al-is al-ijtima'iyah*) in Islam.

Figure 6. Distribution of natural gifts *Sa-uyunan* Muharram tradition



Source: Personal Documentation, 2025

Figure 6 shows the moment of distributing prizes to all participants of the Sa-uyunan Muharram event, from parents to children. In the photo, you can see the enthusiasm of the participants, especially children, when receiving prizes as the closing of the series of traditions. This activity symbolizes the principle of justice and equal joy for all levels of society who attend. Ali explained that "The gift made all residents, especially children, enthusiastic, to come every year" (Personal communication, June 29, 2025). This statement reveals the function of gifts as positive reinforcement that ensures the continuity of traditions across generations. Children, as the next generation, are given an emotional incentive to stay involved in the tradition.

Sa-uyunan Philosophy: Togetherness as a Social Praxis

The philosophy of sa-uyunan, which forms the core of this tradition, is rooted in the Sundanese concept of *mufakat* (deliberative consensus) and collective togetherness. Etymologically, the word "*sa-uyun*" derives from "*uyun*," meaning voice or opinion, with the prefix "*sa*" meaning one. Thus, sa-uyunan can be understood as "one voice" or "consensus," reflecting the ideal of social harmony.

In the context of the Muharram tradition, the philosophy of sa-uyunan is operationalized through three main principles: deliberation, mutual cooperation, and friendship. The principle of deliberation can be seen from the collective decision-making process across DKM in designing and implementing traditions. YS, the coordinator of the activity, explained that this tradition began "at the initiation and deliberation of the figures of each DKM" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

The principle of mutual cooperation is manifested in the division of duties and responsibilities in the implementation of traditions. Each DKM has a specific role: DKM Sindangsari is in charge of coordinating the pilgrimage, DKM Patahanan provides a place for congregational prayers and food, while DKM Lumbung is the end point of the parade and the distribution of prizes. This division of roles reflects the principle of complementarity that is the basis for mutual cooperation.

The principle of friendship is manifested through the creation of spaces for intense social interaction during the implementation of traditions. IP, Chairman of RT, confirmed that this tradition makes connections between residents “are clearly closer, who usually rarely meet now so they know each other and forgive each other” (Personal communication, June 28, 2025).

The philosophy of sa-uyunan is also articulated in the classic Sundanese concept of "*silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh*" which is integrated with Islamic values. MM, Chairman of DKM, explained that Sunda teaches to love each other, hone each other, and nurture each other. This is what was first felt in the Sa-uyunan Muharram event” (Personal communication, July 29, 2025). This concept reflects the ideal trilogy of social relationships: loving each other (*silih asih*), mutual education (*silih asah*), and nurturing each other (*silih asuh*).

Social Function and Community Cohesion

The analysis of the social function of the Sa-uyunan Muharram tradition reveals its role as a multidimensional social integration mechanism. Émile Durkheim (1995) in his analysis of religious rituals explained that rituals function to strengthen social solidarity through the creation of collective effervescence. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that collective effervescence during communal rituals enhances group identity, social integration, and communal well-being (Pizarro et al. 2022). This concept is very relevant to understanding the function of Sa-uyunan Muharram in the context of Sundanese society. The tradition’s capacity to generate bonding and bridging social capital through ritual practice aligns with Swart’s (2017) framework on religious ritual as the missing element in social capital formation, and is further supported by Gemar’s (2024) work showing the role of religious identification in strengthening social networks. Comparable dynamics are visible in the Sund-calendar rituals of the AKUR community in Kuningan, West Java, where annual ritual cycles sustain cohesion across spatially dispersed satellite communities (Adisaputri, Sudradjat, and Widiastuti 2022), and in the Sasak-Lombok rice domestication rituals where Islamic values and local cultural practice create complementary systems of meaning (Saharudin 2021). Recent studies on religious practices in Indonesia show that communal rituals involving multiple stakeholders have a significant impact on strengthening social bonds and reducing the potential for intergroup conflict (Sanjaya 2022; Setinawati et al. 2025; Witro et al. 2023).

The tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram functions as a horizontal integration mechanism that unites citizens across geographical and socioeconomic boundaries. The implementation of the tradition involving three regions (Sindangsari, Patahanun, and Lumbung) creates a sense of belonging that goes beyond narrow local identities. SH as a community leader confirmed that this tradition “Tangible evidence of cohesiveness. That is not just a name, but a reality” (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

Horizontal integration also occurs across social stratification. The implementation of traditions involving religious leaders, village officials, traders, farmers, and workers in relatively equal positions creates a temporary suspension of hierarchy that allows the creation of a community (Turner, 1969). This is reinforced by the nature of the activity that does not require a large financial contribution from individual participants.

In addition to horizontal integration, the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram also serves as a mechanism for vertical integration across generations. The involvement of children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly in a series of activities creates a natural and fun space for the transmission of values. FB, a young man, explained that “The younger generation is more creative. We manage social media, announce events, and create a more festive atmosphere” (Personal communication, June 29, 2025).

The process of transmitting values occurs through modeling and participatory learning mechanisms. Children learn the values of respect for their ancestors through observation and direct participation in pilgrimage rituals. They also internalize the value of sharing through the experience of receiving and witnessing the distribution of food and gifts. Ustad AS explained that “*Through* a simple but meaningful way, children can experience firsthand the teachings of Islam: respect, stay in touch, share, and worship” (Personal communication, June 29, 2025).

The tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram serves as a marker of collective identity that distinguishes this community from other communities. Benedict Anderson (2006) in the concept of "imagined community" explains that collective identity is formed through rituals and shared symbols. Sa-uyunan Muharram creates a narrative of identity as a harmonious and mutual cooperation Muslim-Sundanese community.

This identity construction is strengthened by the claimed uniqueness of tradition. YS Activity Coordinator stated that "Sa-uyunan Muharram is the identity of our village. Symbol of faith, friendship, and togetherness" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025). This statement reveals the function of tradition as cultural capital that provides distinction and pride to the community. Contemporary research shows that local religious traditions in Indonesia play an important role as identity markers that distinguish one community from another, while strengthening the sense of belonging in the midst of globalization (Auliya 2023; Nasriandi et al. 2023; Syafieh and Anzhaikan 2023).

Dynamics of Change and Adaptation

A diachronic analysis of the Sa-uyunan Muharram tradition reveals the dynamics of change that show the flexibility and adaptability of the tradition to social change. The main changes occurred in three aspects: institutionalization, ritual elaboration, and the utilization of technology.

The most significant change is the transformation from a partial activity per DKM to a cross-DKM joint activity. Ustad ZN explained that "actually this tradition has existed since the time of previous figures, but in the past, it was done per DKM" (Personal communication, July 27, 2025). This institutionalization creates a scale effect that magnifies the social impact of traditions and increases the sense of collectivity. The process of institutionalization is driven by the need to strengthen the Islamic *ukhuwah* in the midst of modernization challenges that threaten traditional social cohesion. YS Activity Coordinator explained that the main purpose of the merger is "Want to strengthen the Islamic *ukhuwah* and in welcoming the Islamic New Year wants to be more festive" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025).

The second change was the elaboration of ritual elements with the addition of torch parades, food distribution, and gift distribution. YS explained that "In the past, the activity was only a pilgrimage to teachers and local figures at the Indrataruna tomb, but now it is more crowded in addition to the pilgrimage, there is a torch parade, food and gifts are distributed" (Personal communication, June 27, 2025). This elaboration reflects the adaptation to the expectations of the younger generation which requires more engaging and visually appealing elements. The addition of ritual elements is also driven by symbolic competitions with the celebration of the new year AD. The activity coordinator explicitly stated the goal of "don't lose to the new year of Christ" in designing festive activities. This shows the community's awareness of the need to create an alternative celebration that is Islamic but still appealing to the younger generation.

The third change is the integration of technology and social media in the promotion and documentation of traditions. HI explains that "We are the ones who manage social media, announce events, and create a more festive atmosphere" (Personal communication, June 29, 2025). The use of social media not only serves as a means of promotion, but also as a mechanism for documentation and preservation of collective memory. This reflects broader Indonesian Muslim digital practice, where social media simultaneously facilitates religious expression and generates tensions around the authenticity of piety (Husein and Slama 2018). The use of technology creates an expanded audience for traditions that were previously local. Through social media, the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram can be known to the wider Muslim community, creating the potential for replication in other areas. However, technology also presents challenges in maintaining the intimacy and sense of community that are the main characteristics of tradition.

Sustainability Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

A prospective analysis of the Sa-uyunan Muharram tradition identifies various challenges that need to be faced to ensure the sustainability of the tradition. Key challenges include financial, participatory, and broader social change aspects.

The implementation of the Sa-uyunan Muharram tradition requires a lot of funds, especially for the procurement of food, gifts, and support facilities. YY acknowledges that “The challenge usually lies in funding and participation. But with togetherness, thank God the activity can be carried out” (Personal communication, June 28, 2025). Dependence on financial mutual cooperation faces pressure from changes in the economic structure of society that are increasingly individualistic. The strategies developed to overcome financial challenges are diversification of funding sources through involving successful village alumni, regular donors, and optimization of in-kind contributions from the community. This approach reflects adaptation to modern economic realities without ignoring the traditional principle of mutual cooperation.

Globalization and modernization create challenges in maintaining the active participation of the younger generation who are increasingly exposed to global popular culture. AR admits that even though times continue to change “*Alhamdulillah*, they are enthusiastic” (Personal communication, June 30, 2025), creative efforts are needed to maintain the relevance of traditions for the digital native generation.

The strategies developed include the involvement of the younger generation in planning and implementing activities, the use of social media for promotion, and adapting the format of activities to be more engaging. This approach reflects wisdom in maintaining substance while adapting forms according to the changing times.

Urbanization and high social mobility threaten the continuity of the communities on which traditions are based. Many young generations migrate for education and employment, creating potential discontinuity in the transmission of traditional values and practices. AD, community leaders, proposed a sustainability strategy through “Teaching from childhood, supporting with mutual aid funds, and involving the younger generation” (Personal communication, July 30, 2025). This strategy emphasizes the importance of early socialization, financial sustainability, and leadership regeneration as the key to long-term sustainability.

Discussion

The findings of this study make significant theoretical contributions to the study of religious-cultural dynamics in Southeast Asian Muslim societies, enriching local Islamic studies while opening new perspectives on how religious traditions adapt to the pressures of modernity. The findings of this study also strengthen and at the same time expand the concept of lived religion developed by McGuire (2008) and Orsi (2005). The sa-uyunan Muharram demonstrates that religious practices do not simply adapt Islamic teachings to local cultures, but rather create a synthesis that produces a distinctive new form of spirituality. This resonates with studies of lived Islam in other Muslim communities: McGinty (2023) shows how embodied everyday practices constitute Muslim identities beyond doctrinal boundaries, while Arena (2024) confirms that lived religion frameworks function effectively outside their original Western-Christian contexts. In the Indonesian context specifically, ethnographic studies of local religious traditions confirm that ritual symbols and spiritual legends operate as living systems of meaning actively practiced in daily life (Aran and Simbolon 2025).

In contrast to the lived religion model which tends to be individual-spontaneous, this tradition shows a structured, collective, and institutionalized form of lived religion. This uniqueness lies in the ability of tradition to maintain Islamic orthodoxy while integrating Sundanese values organically paralleling the adaptive acculturation of Islam and Sundanese culture documented by Yanti et al. (2024) and the Islam-custom dialogue in West Java communities examined by Miharja, Kustana, and Khomisah (2025). This phenomenon indicates that lived religion in the context of Southeast Asia has different characteristics from the Western-Christian context on which McGuire (2008) theorizes it.

This research also challenges the symbolic anthropological approach of Geertz (1973) which tends to seek a singular and stable meaning in the symbolic system of culture. As stated by Clifford (1986), the effort to find an essentialist meaning actually closes the possibility of the birth of dynamic and layered interpretations in cultural practices. In this context, Sa-uyunan Muharram shows polysemy and fluidity of meaning, where cultural symbols are never singular, but are open to different interpretations according to the social position, generation,

and individual experience of the participants. The symbol of pilgrimage, for example, can be interpreted simultaneously as the practice of *birrul walidain* in the religious dimension, the veneration of ancestors in the cultural dimension, and the medium of value learning in the pedagogical dimension, a practice that reflects "fun spaces" in identity negotiation as described in the study of postcolonial hybridity by Werbner (1996). These findings are in line with criticism of approaches that emphasize the stability of symbolic meaning and favor anthropological readings that are oriented towards crisis, concrete situations, and social dynamics (Kapferer, 2005). Thus, the symbolic hybridity in Sa-uyunan Muharram can be understood as a reflection of the ontological condition of postcolonial societies that constantly negotiate between systems of meaning without losing internal coherence.

In the context of Halbwachs' (1992) theory of collective memory, this study reveals how traditions adapt digital technologies to strengthen, rather than threaten, the continuity of memory. The use of social media in the documentation and promotion of Sa-uyunan Muharram creates an archived and accessible memory across generations and geographies. However, the digitization of collective memory also creates a tension between intimacy and publicity that is characteristic of oral traditions. The transformation from a shared memory limited to local communities to a mediated and globally accessible memory is changing the dynamics of authenticity and ownership of traditions.

Sa-uyunan Muharram can be understood as a creative response to what Charles Taylor (2007) calls the "malaise of modernity," offering an alternative to modern individualism through meaningful communal spaces. The tradition also reveals internal tensions that merit further study: despite its inclusive narrative, the explicitly Islamic nature of its rituals creates "soft exclusion" of non-Muslims, while gendered patterns of participation men leading ceremonial roles, women handling food preparation sit in tension with its egalitarian ideals.

In terms of theoretical implications, this research contributed to the development of several new conceptual frameworks. In the context of lived religion theory, this study proposes the concept of "Institutional Lived Religion" which shows that lived religion is not always individual and spontaneous but can be organized and collective. In the theory of social cohesion, this research introduces the concept of "Ritual Cohesion" which explains how religious rituals create social capital that goes beyond bond capital to bridge capital. In the theory of cultural resilience, the research develops a model of "Adaptive Traditionalism" that explains how traditions maintain core values while adapting peripheral practices.

The practical implications of this research are significant. For public policy, the findings support revitalizing local traditions as social development strategies through cultural documentation, targeted grants, and integration into formal education. Sa-uyunan Muharram also offers a practical model for Indonesia's concept of "Religious Moderation," demonstrating that strong religious identity can coexist with tolerance and social harmony. Future research directions include longitudinal studies of tradition evolution, comparative studies with Muharram traditions in other Muslim regions, and specific analyses of gender dynamics and economic impact.

Research on Sa-uyunan Muharram ultimately reveals that local religious traditions hold significant potential as social resources for navigating the challenges of modernity. This tradition demonstrates that Islam in Indonesia not only adapts to local contexts but generates models of religious practice that contribute to harmonious and just societies offering a compelling alternative to cultural homogenization by maintaining local distinctiveness while remaining relevant to contemporary needs.

CONCLUSION

This research fulfilled the main objective by revealing that the tradition of Sa-uyunan Muharram contains four main symbolic systems: pilgrimage as spiritual continuity and respect across generations, the distribution of food as a manifestation of solidarity and equal distribution of sustenance, the torch parade as a representation of the light of faith and unity of the ummah, and the distribution of gifts as a symbol of justice and joy. The philosophy of Sa-uyunan that underlies this tradition is operationalized through three principles:

deliberation in collective decision-making, mutual cooperation in the division of roles and responsibilities, and friendship in the creation of an intensive social interaction space. This tradition has proven to contribute significantly to the harmony of Sundanese society through its function as a mechanism for horizontal integration across geographical and socioeconomic boundaries, vertical integration across generations, and the formation of a collective identity as a harmonious Muslim-Sundanese community.

The key findings of this study suggest that Sa-uyunan Muharram represents a form of "institutional lived religion" that challenges the dichotomy between formal and informal religious practices. This tradition demonstrates the ability of the local Muslim community to create an organic synthesis between universal Islamic values and Sundanese cultural wisdom without losing religious orthodoxy. The significance of the research lies in its contribution to the understanding of local Islamic dynamics in Indonesia, especially in facing the challenges of modernity and globalization. The study also uncovered a model of "adaptive traditionalism" in which communities successfully maintain core values while innovating peripheral practices, including the use of digital technologies to strengthen collective memory and documentation of traditions.

This research opens several avenues for further studies that include longitudinal studies to understand the long-term evolution of traditions in the face of more intensive social changes, comparative studies with the Muharram tradition in different Muslim regions and countries to identify regional variations and universal adaptation patterns, as well as evaluation of the impact of tradition on objective indicators of well-being and social cohesion of the community. Special research is also needed on the gender dimension in participation and the interpretation of traditions, economic impact analysis on the local economy, and studies on the potential adaptation of the Sa-uyunan Muharram model for a more heterogeneous societal context. Further research also needs to explore the establishment of formal institutions for the research and development of local religious traditions as a strategy for cultural preservation and sustainable social development.

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