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TOLERANCE CHARACTER BUILDING THROUGH MARSIALAPARI TRADITION: A CASE STUDY OF HUTA PADANG VILLAGE COMMUNITY, MANDAILING NATAL

Rohman,¹ Irma Suryani Siregar,²

^{1,2}Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal

Jl. Prof. Dr. Andi Hakim Nasution, Panyabungan 22978

rohman@stain-madina.ac.id


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Abstract

This research aims to explore the application of the marsialapari tradition in Huta Padang Village, Mandailing Natal, and its impact on the character building of tolerance in the local community. The tradition of marsialapari, a typical practice of gotong royong in Mandailing and Angkola culture, continues to be preserved in this village even though the influence of modernization has eroded it in many other places. This type of research is qualitative with a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The results show that marsialapari not only plays a role in supporting agricultural activities, but also as an important mechanism in building and maintaining tolerance values among people of diverse religions. Through participation in this tradition, the people of Huta Padang Village develop mutual respect, openness and empathy, which characterize tolerant characters. This finding is reinforced by functionalism theory, which highlights the role of tradition in maintaining social stability, and social capital theory, which emphasizes the importance of consistent social interaction in strengthening social cohesion. Thus, this study reveals that marsialapari is not just a cultural heritage, but also a strategic tool to maintain social harmony in a multicultural society.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Managing Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity is crucial to maintaining a peaceful life. The big challenge in multicultural communities such as Huta Padang village, Mandailing Natal, is to maintain harmony and strengthen the character of tolerance in the midst of differences. The phenomenon of increasing social tension and conflict between community groups in various regions in Indonesia indicates that tolerance character building still faces various challenges (Suharto et al., 2023; Jayadi, 2022). This is reinforced by the results of studies showing that social instability is often triggered by a lack of understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity (Sariyatun & Marpelina, 2023; Jamiludin et al., 2023). In this context, the marsialapari tradition, which is part of the Mandailing community culture, is believed to have an important role in shaping and strengthening the character of tolerance among the community.

Marsialapari is a tradition of mutual cooperation that involves all community members regardless of religious background, ethnicity, or social status. In character building theory, values instilled through social activities such as gotong royong can strengthen social cohesion and reduce the potential for conflict (Lickona, 2013; Jayadi et al, 2023). Research shows that the practice of gotong royong can increase social solidarity and reduce social segregation in diverse communities (Simarmata et al., 2019). Values such as cooperation, mutual respect and empathy contained in the Marsialapari tradition reflect the main principles of the concept of tolerance proposed by various experts. Character education theories proposed by Lickona (2013) and Pala (2011) emphasize the importance of habituation of moral and social values through direct interaction in the community environment as one of the most effective ways to shape individual character, including tolerance.

Previous research on the marsialapari tradition generally emphasizes the socio-cultural aspects and does not explore how this tradition can be integrated in character building efforts, especially tolerance. For example, research (Muhajir, 2024) focuses on the social function of Marsialapari in maintaining the social cohesion of Mandailing society, but does not specifically discuss how this tradition can play a role in tolerance character building. Another weakness of previous studies is the lack of in-depth analysis of the impact of this tradition on individuals and communities in the context of character building in an increasingly complex

and challenging modern era. A study by (Parhan & Dwiputra, 2023) also shows the great potential of local traditions in shaping character, but a more systematic and comprehensive approach is still needed to optimally explore this potential.

This research aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining the role of Marsialapari tradition in tolerance character building in a more in-depth and contextual manner. First, this research aims to analyze how this tradition is applied in daily life by the people of Huta Padang and second, how this marsialapari tradition impacts on individual and community character. Third, this research aims to provide practical recommendations for the development of character education programs based on local wisdom such as Marsialapari. Thus, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of a more effective approach to tolerance character building in Indonesia.

The urgency of this research is based on the importance of finding a contextual and relevant approach to tolerance character building in a multicultural society like Indonesia. According to Tilaar, approaches based on local wisdom can be more effective in building community character because they are more in line with the values that have been embedded in local culture (Tilaar, 2015). This view is supported by other studies that show that the integration of local values in character education can increase the relevance and effectiveness of educational programs (Yusuf et al., 2024). Social learning theory proposed by (Bandura, 1997) also supports the importance of behavioral models that can be observed and imitated by individuals in the character building process. In this case, Marsialapari offers a concrete model that can be a source of learning for the community, especially in building tolerance character. This research is important to conduct in order to develop a deeper understanding of how traditional values can be integrated into character education in an increasingly global and complex era.

B. METHODS

This research is qualitative with a case study approach to explore the application of the marsialapari tradition and its impact on tolerance character building in Huta Padang Village, Mandailing Natal. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social phenomena in depth and contextually (Creswell, 2007). Data were collected through in-depth interview

techniques, participatory observation, and document analysis, with participants selected purposively. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with various community leaders, including religious and traditional leaders, to explore their views on the role of the marsialapari tradition in maintaining social cohesion. Observations were made during traditional activities, while local documents were reviewed to complement the information obtained (Patton, 2002). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns and themes relevant to tolerance character building, and compared with social theories such as functionalism and social capital to strengthen the research findings.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Application of Marsialapari Tradition in the Life of Huta Padang Community

Marsialapari is a tradition of mutual cooperation owned by the Mandailing and Angkola communities. Literally marsialapari consists of two words *yakti alap* (pick up) *ari* (day). Then add the word *mar* which means mutual and the word *si* so that it becomes *marsialapari*, meaning to pick up the day. This tradition is a reflection of the culture and local wisdom values of Mandailing people which are an integral part of community life. However, along with the times and the flow of modernization, the practice of marsialapari has now begun to be abandoned by most people, especially in urban areas.

However, in Huta Padang village, Mandailing Natal, this tradition is still preserved and practiced well. This village is unique because the population consists of two major religions, namely Islam and Christianity. It is located at the southern end of Mandailing Natal district, directly adjacent to West Sumatra province. This area is relatively far from the urban area, about 10 km from the cross-Sumatra road. Although there are differences in beliefs, the people of Huta Padang village maintain the marsialapari tradition as a form of culture that forms harmony between them. So that a tolerant character is formed and creates a harmonious relationship between citizens.

Marsialapari in Huta Padang village is applied in every social and cultural work such as parties, deaths, and especially in planting (*manyuan eme*) and harvesting rice (*manyabi*), considering that this village is an agricultural area. An

interview with Anjasmara Nasution, a villager, revealed that this tradition is very meaningful in maintaining the sustainability of the community's agriculture and strengthening the brotherhood among fellow villagers.

“Every planting and harvesting season, we get together and help each other. We take turns doing this. It doesn't matter if they are Muslim or Christian, we work together. No wages are given by those who are helped, everyone comes voluntarily.” (Nasution, 2023).

Marsialapari is carried out by residents of Huta Padang by inviting neighbors and close relatives. In addition, some other residents come to offer themselves to participate in marsialapari. Marsialapari is carried out by taking turns from one rice field to another, and from one workplace to another with a full sense of kinship and togetherness. The formation of this kinship is also inseparable from the kinship system adopted by the Huta Padang community called *dalian na tolu*, which is a family bond that does not look at religion, but is seen from marital and clan ties (Rohman et al., 2021).

This marsialapari practice reflects the values of mutual cooperation that are still strongly held by the Huta Padang community. In this activity, not only labor is provided by participants, but also enthusiasm and moral support that helps ease the work. Everyone involved feels equally responsible for ensuring that the work is done well and on time. Therefore, marsialapari is not only a physical activity, but also a symbol of social solidarity that strengthens relationships between residents.

In addition, the implementation of marsialapari also shows the importance of community involvement in maintaining the sustainability of living together. By helping each other with work, such as cultivating rice fields, the Huta Padang community ensures that every member of the community has fair access to agricultural products. This is also a means to avoid unhealthy competition and maintain harmony within the community. Through marsialapari, there is a collective awareness of the importance of helping each other for the common welfare.

The *dalian na tolu* kinship that underpins marsialapari also shows how local traditions play a role in maintaining social order. This system regulates how relationships between families are established and maintained, and how conflicts

are resolved in a peaceful and fair manner. In the context of marsialapari, dalian na tolu ensures that each family receives equal support from the community, regardless of differences in religion or social status.

Furthermore, the marsialapari tradition is also a means of informal education for the younger generation in Huta Padang. Through their involvement in this activity, they learn about the importance of mutual cooperation, shared responsibility and local wisdom values that are passed down from generation to generation. Thus, marsialapari not only maintains old traditions, but also becomes a tool for transmitting cultural values that are essential for the survival of the Huta Padang community.

The practice of marsialapari, which focuses on agricultural activities, reflects how this tradition has been adapted to meet the specific needs of the local community. The activity of planting and harvesting rice, which involves all residents regardless of religious differences, becomes an important moment where the values of tolerance are instilled and reinforced. This tradition also serves as an important tool in maintaining social cohesion and reducing the potential for conflict in the village.

Talcott Parsons in his functionalist structure theory states that every element in society has a certain function that supports social stability and continuity (Parsons, 1949). The marsialapari tradition in Huta Padang village can be seen as a cultural element that functions to maintain social cohesion and community integration, especially in the context of a religiously diverse society.

Marsialapari, as a tradition of mutual cooperation involving all community members, both Muslims and Christians, serves as a tool to strengthen social ties and minimize the potential for conflict. Through participation in this tradition, Huta Padang villagers learn to cooperate and understand each other, which ultimately shapes tolerant characters and builds harmonious relationships.

The theory of pluralism, which supports cultural and religious diversity in society, is also relevant to understanding how the marsialapari tradition contributes to social harmony in Huta Padang Village. Within the framework of pluralism, each cultural or religious group has the freedom to practice its traditions and beliefs, while at the same time, there are universal values that unite the community as a whole.

In Huta Padang village, despite religious differences, the marsialapari tradition is accepted and practiced by all groups. This shows that the shared values contained in the tradition, such as mutual assistance and gotong royong, take precedence over religious differences. This tradition becomes the social glue that allows pluralism to work well in the village.

Through the above theoretical perspective, it can be seen that the practice of marsialapari by the Huta Padang community is not just about maintaining tradition, but also plays an important role in shaping a tolerant, harmonious and inclusive society. This tradition, with all its social and cultural values, serves as an important mechanism in maintaining social balance and stability amidst religious differences. Therefore, maintaining the marsialapari tradition is a strategic step to maintain harmony and strengthen social capital in society.

Impact of Marsialapari Implementation on Individual and Community Character

The implementation of the marsialapari tradition has a significant impact on the character of each individual of the Huta Padang community. Hasanuddin as a Muslim leader emphasized that through marsialapari, villagers are taught to live in need of each other and coexist peacefully. This is in line with research showing that the tradition of gotong royong in agrarian societies plays an important role in building social solidarity (Zaki, 2020). Mantasia as a Christian leader said that this tradition distances the community from religious differences, instead promoting interfaith cooperation. Anjasmara Nasution as a village youth also added that this tradition shapes the character of villagers to be more open, patient, and empathetic, all of which are traits of a tolerant character.

Although marsialapari is a Mandailing tradition that has been abandoned in many places due to the influence of modernity, in Huta Padang village it is still preserved. The villagers, who are both Muslims and Christians, still see this tradition as an important part of their cultural identity. In many other Mandailing communities, modernization has eroded local traditions such as marsialapari, but the people of Huta Padang village are committed to maintaining it as a valuable cultural heritage.

Geographically, Huta Padang village is categorized as an 'inland' area. One of the middle villages among the row of villages along the Pakantan kecamatan road. Access to Huta Padang village passes through the forest and hills about 10 km from the trans-Sumatra road. The end of the access to this village directly borders the West Sumatra region with unpaved road conditions, making access to this village by public transportation only through one door, namely from the Sumatra crossing road. Thus, geographical factors contribute to making cultural heritage such as marsialapari still preserved for generations by the people of Huta Padang who are far from the influence of modernity.

The marsialapari tradition in Huta Padang Village has a very significant role in shaping the character of the community, especially in terms of tolerance. This tradition involves all levels of society regardless of religious background, creating a unique and harmonious pattern of interaction. The involvement of various religious groups in one activity together teaches them to respect each other and understand the differences that exist. This is not just a social formality, but a collective experience that deepens the sense of unity in the midst of diversity.

Marsialapari in this village is not just a cultural tradition, but also an important platform for strengthening social bonds between residents. Every individual involved in this activity, whether from the majority or minority religious groups, is given the opportunity to contribute equally. The interactions that occur in marsialapari foster empathy and social sensitivity, where each citizen learns to put themselves in the perspective of others. Through this shared experience, they can see and feel the importance of respecting differences, which in turn strengthens mutual understanding between them.

Observations show that the marsialapari tradition has a significant impact in building collective consciousness among the community. This awareness is particularly evident in how the community views the importance of cooperation, which is not limited to just one religious group or faction. The tradition teaches that to achieve a common goal, all individuals, regardless of religious background, need to actively contribute. This creates an environment where tolerance and understanding of differences are fundamental to every social interaction.

In the implementation of marsialapari, residents not only focus on the ultimate goal of the activities undertaken, but also pay great attention to the process

of cooperation itself. Observations show that this process involves very intensive communication and coordination among participants. Each individual has interconnected roles and responsibilities, which requires openness in communication and the ability to adjust to common needs. This process builds deep cooperation skills, where each party feels valued and their contributions recognized.

Intensive communication and coordination during the implementation of marsialapari indirectly instills values of tolerance among participants. Observations show that when people are involved in the problem-solving process together, they learn to put aside differences and focus on solutions that benefit all parties. This process shows how this tradition is not just a ritual, but also an effective means to build mutual respect and acceptance of differences, which is fundamental in creating interfaith harmony.

Overall, the marsialapari tradition has evolved into more than just a cultural ritual. Based on observations, this tradition has functioned as an effective social mechanism in creating interfaith harmony. Marsialapari allows the community to continuously strengthen social relations through positive and productive interactions. Through cooperation based on tolerance and understanding, this tradition has proven to be able to maintain social harmony and stability in the midst of religious diversity in the community.

The Huta Padang community consistently engages in gotong royong activities, which have become an important part of their daily lives. This activity not only serves as a means to complete work together, but also encourages the creation of close and mutually supportive relationships between residents. Active involvement in gotong royong reflects the open attitude developed by the community, where each individual has a role and responsibility in maintaining environmental harmony.

The open attitude developed through gotong royong further strengthens mutual trust among residents. Each individual feels safe and comfortable because of the belief that fellow community members will help and support each other in any situation. This is in accordance with the social capital theory proposed by Fukuyama (1999), which emphasizes that consistent and sustainable social interactions can increase trust and tolerance within the community. Thus, gotong

royong is not only seen as a physical activity, but also as an important means of building a foundation of social trust.

Pierre Bourdieu, through the concept of habitus, explains how social practices that are repeatedly carried out can shape the mindset and actions of individuals (Bourdieu, 2000). In the case of marsialapari, mutual cooperation activities involving all Huta Padang villagers, both Muslims and Christians, gradually form a tolerant habitus among them.

Through repeated participation in marsialapari, the values of tolerance are not only taught, but also internalized in the daily lives of the community. This makes tolerance an inherent part of the character of the people of Huta Padang village, which is strengthened by their collective experience in carrying out the tradition.

Marsialapari, a tradition of mutual cooperation in an agrarian society, not only serves as a practical tool to support agricultural activities, but also has an important role in building and maintaining tolerance values among the community. In this activity, people work together on one another's fields or paddy fields in shifts, which not only eases the burden of work but also strengthens social relations among them. Marsialapari allows for closer communication, mutual understanding and a strengthened sense of community, all of which are important foundations for tolerance.

The success of the Huta Padang village community in maintaining the Marsialapari tradition amidst the swift influence of modernity is a clear example of how local values can survive and adapt to changing times. Even though technology and modern lifestyles began to penetrate into daily life, the people of Huta Padang were able to maintain the essence of Marsialapari, namely cooperation and togetherness. This shows that traditional values do not have to be abandoned in the modernization process, but can be harmonized to strengthen social ties and maintain cultural identity.

In the context of a multicultural society, Marsialapari is not only a tool to maintain tradition, but also contributes significantly to social cohesion and character building. It teaches the importance of cooperation, mutual respect and building harmonious relationships amidst differences. By maintaining Marsialapari, the Huta Padang community provides an example of how local values can be a

pillar for a more inclusive and tolerant social life, which ultimately enriches social life in the era of globalization.

D. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the marsialapari tradition in Huta Padang village has a significant impact on the character building of tolerance among the community. Through mutual cooperation involving all residents regardless of religious background, marsialapari has become an effective mechanism in building mutual respect and cooperation. Sociological theories such as functionalism, social capital and habitus corroborate these findings by showing how social practices that are continuously preserved can play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining a tolerant character in a multicultural society. The marsialapari tradition, thus, serves not only as an economic practice but also as an important foundation in creating sustainable social harmony.

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