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THE PRACTICE OF KEJAWEN RITUALS THROUGH *NGEBLENG* FASTING

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Abstract:

This study uses a phenomenological approach to reveal the psychological and social impact on three Ngebleng fasting performers in Kutasari village, Cipari district, and Cilacap district. Documentation and in-depth interviews are the main instruments for extracting as much information as possible and then interpreting it based on the phenomena obtained. The results showed that the psychological impact felt by fasting performers included inner peace, less emotional stress, and healthier physical conditions. Meanwhile, the social effects felt by the ritual actors varied. One perpetrator admitted that after undergoing Ngebleng fasting, he felt the smoothness of rizki and the establishment of good social relations; his fortune was smoother and social relations were not disturbed. Still, two people admitted that when fasting, they became less enthusiastic about interacting with the surrounding community because, apart from feeling weak physically, there were also considerations of maintaining so that the fast does not fail.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Javanese people, in particular, some people try to be able to achieve physical and mental happiness by trying not only to work for material gain but also to find other ways to get closer to God or commonly called tirakat (Fadli et al., 2021). Tirakat can be done by fasting kejawen or visiting places that are considered sacred such as mountains or tombs. Even the relic of Animism and dynamism (Yaqin, 2021).

With rituals, community groups and individuals try to stage what are the ideas, ideals, beliefs, values, and expectations contained in their culture. (Arifin & Khambali, 2016; Ramly et al., 2020). In some societies, rituals manifest themselves in almost every stage of a person's life, beginning with the period of conception (in the womb), birth, until death; even after human death, people still carry out rituals (Busro & Qodim, 2018; Karim, 2017).

The descriptive belief of the Javanese is very much felt when it is associated with an increasingly harmonious, suitable, and comfortable worldview and the religion in achieving inner peace. So the inner peace that Javanese people who adhere to kejawen want to achieve is establishing closeness with God, especially by not carrying out their religious orders, which are attached well. Still, they are trying to do tirakat (Khakim, 2020).

Every culture and religion has rituals. Turner defines ritual as words and behaviors on certain occasions that are not routine or as an embodiment of the value of a religious belief and mystical power (Turner & Abrahams, 2017). Rituals show a repeatedly gradual action, have a traditional character and describe an attitude that shows the values of people's beliefs (Zainal, 2014).

A few Javanese people with kejawen beliefs have a playing religion such as Islam or other religions. In faith, among the Javanese people, some groups have syncretic views (Safiq, 2019). In a sense, they tend to compromise things that are somewhat different and even contrary to religion with something outside of religion. Syncretism for the Javanese also means that they tend to have a view that does not question right or wrong in faith, whether religion is pure or not. So, all religions are seen as accurate (Arifai, 2019).

Kejawen as a belief can be considered a mixed religion called Animism. The word Kejawen comes from the Javanese language, which means everything related to Javanese customs and beliefs. The naming "kejawen" is general, usually because the language of worship is Javanese (Safrida & Wardana, 2018). The fact also shows that although in its traditional form, the Javanese culture-oriented society shows a willing attitude towards Islamic values (Oktafia, 2017).

Kuntjaraningrat, in the book *Javanese Culture*, explains that humans live in the world only as "stopping by for a drink" in living a long life that leads to oneness with God (Hendro, 2018). To achieve this goal, humans need to have the attitude of *nerimo* (accept) and *rila* (willing). Willingness is an attitude that can give up property rights, break away from objects, the desire to be owned, and the thoughts and feelings to have. This willing attitude will bring out the spiritual element in oneself. *Nerimo* is an attitude of accepting fate and being patient with all that is received and given to him by the Creator. This attitude is obtained from a simple lifestyle and other efforts through special rituals such as meditation to continue to cultivate the soul and inner feelings (Fadli et al., 2021).

Some efforts to reach the level of oneness with God are through learning the following three groups: *heneng*, *hening*, and *henong* (Nawafi, 2020). *Meneng* or *heneng* is the process of cessation of worldly desires. Evil lust will be treated by special rituals such as asceticism, fasting, asceticism, or others until a state is obtained, known as the silence of desire. After reaching this state, the person will enter a particular or silent state; in that state, the individual is considered clean of mind and soul from all material things, or there is only an object of purpose, namely God. Then, the last level is empty or silent; in this state, a person is pointless and able to receive God's light. Generally, at this level, a person has accepted direct guidance from God and can open the mind's eye. (Ahsan et al., 2016).

One of the symbolic actions of ancient relics is an attempt to strengthen one's inner strength so that it can exert an influence on the power of the universe. This effort is taken by reducing sleep and preventing eating, *mutih* –only eating white foods such as drinking water, white rice— being concerned (feeling inner pain). There is also a practice of being involved with fasting on the day of *wetonan* (birth) based on the Javanese calendar (*legi*, *pahing*, *pon*, *wage*, *kliwon*). And the most challenging thing is to carry out *pati-geni*, a ritual without seeing any light for 40 days and 40 nights and abstaining from eating or drinking (Herusatoto, 2020).

According to Durkheim, to study the behavioural characteristics of a human being, we do not need to learn them from his behaviour. Still, we check the sociology of the social environment in which the individual lives. Research is enough to be done sociologically because we automatically also know the ins and outs of psychology (Mulawarman & Nurfitri, 2017).

In this case, fasting rituals are carried out as permanent activities, but beliefs, life backgrounds, intentions or doctrines may have changed. Traditions also have a social function, namely to streamline community solidarity. In practice, not everyone who participates in the ceremony does it seriously as an obligation, but many also carry it out carelessly. Their encouragement in rituals is not only to prove their devotion to God, as well as to obtain religious satisfaction but to assess traditions as merely a social obligation. (Haedar, 2016).

Van Gennep views a ritual from a different perspective. He said that, in essence, rites function as an activity to regenerate the spirit of social life in society. For the stage of growth as an individual, a person whose social and biological environment changes will affect the soul and cause a mental crisis. It is necessary to regenerate the spirit of life by someone. This is because there is always a time when there will be sluggishness in the heart of social life. At that point, the ritual is carried out to bring back the nature of life (Zainal, 2014).

To achieve inner peace or the desire to achieve their goals, they carry out various rituals that are not taught by their religion, but carry out Fasting Ngebleng, fasting without breaking the fast at all for a specific time. In addition, fasting performers are also not allowed to leave the room or leave the house. Ngebleng fasting can be carried out for up to 40 consecutive days. This fasting practice, in addition to curbing lust, also aims to gain supernatural powers. (Ariyanti, 2019; Basuki, 2020).

Primarily among them, some store objects that are considered to have magical powers, such as amulets in the form of agate rings or other things. This could have a psychological and social impact on the perpetrators of the Kejawen fasting because not everyone in their environment understands the Kejawen ritual as such. Whether this appreciation will result in a negative or positive attitude will depend on several other factors.

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is research that uses a natural setting to interpret existing phenomena and is carried out by involving several existing methods (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Researchers about this form a meaning related to a sensation following the subject's views. This study seeks to reveal data on the psychological and social impacts of the three Ngebleng fasting actors with in-depth interviews in order to obtain as much information as possible and then interpret based on the phenomena obtained.

A society is used as an object of research through a phenomenological approach, meaning that it seeks to understand the meaning of beliefs, symbols, or rituals that it understands itself. The phenomenological approach was chosen to describe a person's life experience related to a particular phenomenon explained by the subject (Farid, 2018). Of course, every society understands its culture that will vary because culture and society are also diverse (Nuryana et al., 2019).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To get a clearer picture of what is their goal in carrying out the Ngebleng fast and how they carry out the Kejawen Fast, the author will describe as follows:

1. The Purpose of Fasting Ngebleng

Seeing the goal, Deni Daryani (Woman) as an informant running the Ngebleng fast, the primary purpose of which is to get inner peace and social encouragement to fulfil the economic needs of her household by praying for her husband to work to find sustenance more efficiently and smoothly. This is in line with Saifuddin Azwar's explanation that people around us are one of the social components that also affect our attitudes (Azwar, 2013). People we think are essential, someone we don't want to disappoint, individuals we want approval for all our opinions and behaviours, and individuals who have special meaning for us will have a lot of influence on the formation of attitudes towards something. People generally considered necessary to someone are parents, peers, people of higher social status, teachers, coworkers, close friends, wives or husbands, and others.

According to Tursino (Man), who happens to be the husband of Deni Daryani's informant to the author, he undergoes Ngebleng fasting and visits places that are considered sacred at certain moments, initially at the urge to follow his spiritual teacher, who is known among the people of Kutasari and surrounding areas as a shaman. kejawen with the aim, among others, to gain esoteric knowledge such as being able to see things that are unseen and good luck.

The information given by Tursino to the researcher, it can be concluded that the purpose of fasting Ngebleng carried out by the informant was initially only to follow his spiritual teacher, who is commonly called a shaman because of the knowledge he practiced was kejawen. The rest of these informants also want to see the unseen as a theory that has an orientation to one's behavior towards the unseen; Rudolf Otto emphasized the awe-inspiring behavior of religious adherents towards sacred and unseen substances. So, humans are interested in uniting with these substances (Agus, 2006).

Meanwhile, Tarwin, a 53-year-old man with a high school education background, is one of the perpetrators of the Ngebleng fasting, who often performs it differently every month for one week. The body is healthier.

If we pay close attention, Tarwin's goal for fasting Kejawen is to achieve physical and spiritual health. With the hope that his vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual abilities can also be fulfilled in a balanced way.

2. Psychological Impact of Fasting Ngebleng

For Deni Daryani, fasting Ngebleng calms her heart and can control her emotions. According to Deni, doing Ngebleng fasting makes the heart feel calmer and less angry. She also hoped that her son would fast Ngebleng.

In line with Deni's statement, Tarwin told researchers that the impact felt during the Kejawen fast became calmer and less hot-tempered, and the body also felt healthier. From direct observations before and during interviews with several informants, it can be concluded that Tarwin does not honestly admit the psychological impact when facing problems. When he met a conflict of issues in the form of failure when planting shallots, he looked devastated. He experienced emotional disturbances such as irritability which caused an uncomfortable atmosphere for his neighbors. He liked to be alone at home even though he finally recovered himself without going to the doctor. As for Tursino, fasting Ngebleng has no psychological impact. According to him, doing the Ngebleng fasting ritual is because he only goes along with people who are considered his spiritual teachers without knowing their intentions and goals.

The spiritual dimension of fasting is indicated by the motivation to control lust which is an effort to internalize religious values in daily behavior. In contrast, the psychological dimension can be used as a therapy for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence. (Fiddari & Turmudi, 2020). According to Goleman, the characteristics of emotional intelligence are divided into five components (Handayani & Septhiani, 2021).

First, self-awareness, individuals can know and choose feelings, why they feel them, understand what is being supposed, and understand the causes of these feelings. Performers of fasting rituals have a high level of awareness to introspect themselves. The second is self-regulation, namely managing emotions to positively impact completing tasks, recovering from emotional stress and delay enjoyment before reaching a goal, and being sensitive to conscience. People who fast regularly are easier to control their emotions because the meaning of fasting itself is to refrain from something that makes fasting invalid. Thus, individuals who do fasting are easy to manage their feelings.

The third is motivation, utilizing the strongest desires to help us move towards goals, act effectively, and help us take the initiative, and survive in the face of frustration and failure. Someone with a better level of emotional intelligence will be more skilled at changing stressful thoughts and always make himself calm quickly. Empathy can understand perspective, feel other people's opinions, adapt to various people, and foster trusting relationships. The fifth is social skills, dealing with emotions well when having relationships with other individuals, good at reading situations, interacting smoothly, and social networks. The art of guiding bonds with

other individuals is a social skill that supports a smooth association with others; without the ability to foster these bonds, individuals will find it difficult to get along.

3. Social Impact of Fasting Ngebleng

During fasting for three days and three nights, followed by breaking the fast, Deni Daryani said that the social impact was not so different from regular days. If during fasting, there are activities that require the informant to follow, such as recitation, community gatherings and others, the person concerned still tries to follow it even though he can't entirely because his body feels uncomfortable, such as weak, especially on the second and third days of fasting. But feel bad if you don't take part in these activities. There seems to be an effort by this informant to balance his fasting behaviour, but social relations with neighbours and relatives remain harmonious.

An informant named Aris, who had a close relationship with Deni's husband, told the researcher that Deni's social relationship with his brother was not immediate. Informant Aris's view of the person who fasts Ngebleng Deni tends to be less successful in social relations. According to Aris, this could be because his character is like that. In the past, he used to live in the big city of Jakarta, which tended to be individualistic, so he continued living in the village until now.

Deni Daryani's husband, Tursino, told the researchers that since carrying out *kejawen* rituals such as gathering at Tejamaya Hill or meditating on a mountain in the Wonosobo area, he had had many social friends from various circles ranging from ordinary people to officials.

Another informant named Tarwin tends to be introverted and rarely socializes with neighbours like people living in the countryside. Based on the results of observations and information from his closest neighbours, Tarwin is classified as a lower-middle economic person. The house he lives in is still made of planks and bamboo, and the floor of his house is still dirt. However, the enthusiasm to work to earn a living for the family and send their children to school is very high when viewed from the rhythm of working hours from morning to evening and even after sunset sometimes, they just come home from tapping people's pine trees in the hills which are about two kilometres from where they live. From his pattern of life, his social relations with his neighbours seem less than good.

From the descriptions of fasting perpetrators reinforced by other informants, the social impact that occurs on Ngebleng and *Kejawen* fasting actors, especially what happened to Tarwin, is indirectly related to weak physical conditions as a result of carrying out Ngebleng fasting with a combination of other types of *Kejawen* fasting—done almost routinely every month unless conditions are not healthy. Meanwhile, the two other Ngebleng fast performers only do the Ngebleng fast only at certain moments, such as before a celebration or have different wishes.

D. CONCLUSION

The Ngebleng fasting ritual carried out by three residents of the Cipari sub-district, Cilacap Regency, has various psychological and social impacts. From the psychological aspect, the fasting person admitted that his heart was calmer, not easily emotional and felt his body healthier after undergoing the series of kejawen fasting. One other perpetrator said that psychologically he did not feel any effect, even the primary purpose of fasting, namely to be able to see the unseen, was not achieved. From the social aspect, the three fasting performers varied; one person admitted that Ngebleng's luck was smoother and social relations were not disturbed after fasting. However, two people realized that when they were fasting, they became less enthusiastic about interacting with the surrounding community because apart from feeling weak physically, there were also considerations to keep their fast from failing. This research is expected to be an entry point for other researchers interested in the world of kejawen to explore the relevance of kejawen fasting for the millennial generation in seeking inner peace.

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