



Islamic Syncretism in the Bele Kampong Tradition in Kundur, Karimun (Riau Islands): A Contextual Local Theological Perspective

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the religious diversity of the Malay community in Kundur, Karimun, (Riau Islands), which is intertwined with local traditions particularly the Bele Kampong tradition that are often viewed as conflicting with Islamic teachings. The study aims to analyze the ritual practices, local theological values, and forms of Islamic syncretism within this tradition. This is a field study employing a descriptive qualitative approach and ethnographic methods. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving traditional leaders, religious figures, and the community of Lubuk Village. The findings reveal that the Bele Kampong ritual comprises pre-ritual, ritual, and post-ritual phases, all rich in religious significance. This tradition encompasses values of cosmogony, mythology, ritual, symbolism, concepts of nature, as well as ethics and morality. The syncretism observed represents a contextualization of Islamic values within local culture that strengthens the social and spiritual harmony of the community. This study affirms that the integration of custom and religion constitutes a form of contextual Islam that is relevant for further examination.

Keywords: Islamic Syncretism, Bele Kampong Tradition, Contextual Local Theology, Kundur, Karimun, Riau Archipelago Malay Culture, Integration of Custom and Religion

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Introduction

Indonesia is known as a society rich in cultural diversity and religious practices that evolve dynamically within the social sphere. In this context, religion does not exist in a vacuum, but rather constantly interacts with local cultures that have long been present and deeply rooted in society. (Hasan, 2025) These interactions have given rise to various distinctive forms of religious expression, one of which is evident in local traditions that embody both religious and cultural values. (Maulidin & Nawawi, 2024)

Among the Malay communities of the Riau Islands, this phenomenon is reflected in the Bele Kampong tradition, a collective ritual performed as a form of prayer for safety, protection, and blessings for the village community. This tradition is not merely a cultural practice but also serves as a space for articulating theological values that are alive and evolving within the community.

In academic studies, the relationship between Islam and local culture is often discussed within the framework of syncretism and contextual theology. Various studies over the past decade have shown that the religious practices of Muslim

communities in Indonesia are inseparable from the process of dialogue with local culture. A study of the Bele Kampong tradition by (Sugiarto et al., 2020), (Mustari et al., 2023), and (Nurfadilah & Roziah, 2024) emphasizes that this tradition embodies strong symbolic, spiritual, and social values, such as gratitude, solidarity, and a harmonious relationship with nature. Meanwhile, research on Islamic syncretism by (Mokhtar & Saâ, 2016), (Lestari & Yunita, 2025) and (Maulidin & Nawawi, 2024) shows that the blending of Islamic teachings and local culture often gives rise to tensions between groups that emphasize the purity of religious teachings and those that accept cultural integration as part of religious expression. On the other hand, studies of contextual local theology, such as those conducted (Dandirwalu et al., 2021) emphasizes that cultural practices can serve as a legitimate theological locus, where religious values are lived out through the concrete experiences of the community.

This study is grounded in Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology, which views religion as a system of symbols through which people construct meaning and interpret reality. From this perspective, religious rituals are not merely actions but symbolic systems that shape how communities understand and experience their world. Contextual theology is used here as a complementary interpretive lens that supports the cultural analysis of religious meaning. In this study, syncretism is used as an analytical category referring to cultural meaning construction rather than theological fusion.

Several gaps remain in previous research. Most studies on the Bele Kampong tradition remain descriptive and focus on symbolic or socio-cultural aspects without deeper theological interpretation. Research on Islamic syncretism tends to adopt a normative framework, either emphasizing acceptance or rejection, without fully exploring how communities interpret these practices as part of their lived religious experience. Furthermore, limited studies explicitly employ a Geertzian interpretive framework to analyze how cultural symbols in local traditions function as a medium for constructing Islamic meaning among Malay Muslim communities in the Riau Islands.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology to reinterpret Islamic syncretism in the Bele Kampong tradition. Unlike previous studies that tend to separate religion and culture or evaluate local traditions normatively, this study demonstrates that religious meaning in the Bele Kampong tradition is constructed through a system of cultural symbols embedded in Malay society. In this sense, Islamic syncretism is understood as a process of cultural meaning-making through symbolic interpretation rather than theological blending.

Theoretically, this study draws on Clifford Geertz's concept of religion as a cultural system of symbols that shape human understanding of reality. This perspective is also complemented by contextual theological considerations as an analytical lens for understanding how religious meaning is formed within local cultural settings. From this framework, elements of the Bele Kampong ritual such as prayers, ritual materials, and communal practices are interpreted

as symbolic mechanisms through which religious meaning is constructed and internalized within the Malay community.

Given this gap, this study focuses on analyzing Islamic syncretism within the Bele Kampong tradition using a contextual local theological perspective. This study aims to: (1) describe the Bele Kampong tradition procession in Lubuk Village, Riau Islands; (2) analyze the local theological values contained within it; and (3) examine the forms of syncretism between Islamic teachings and local culture in this practice.

This research was conducted among the Malay community in Lubuk Village, Kundur District, Karimun Regency, who continue to preserve this tradition as part of their religious life. The units of analysis include the ritual practices of Bele Kampong, the symbols used, and the community's interpretations of the tradition.

This study contributes to the discourse on Islam and local culture by showing that religious practices in local communities cannot be simply understood as either deviation or doctrinal purity, but rather as a process of meaning construction through living symbolic systems embedded in society.

Method

This study is grounded in the grand theoretical framework of Islamic syncretism and contextual local theology. Islamic syncretism is used to analyze the process of interaction and integration between Islamic teachings and local cultural practices in the Bele Kampong tradition. Meanwhile, contextual local theology serves as an analytical approach to understand how religious values are interpreted, internalized, and practiced within the socio-cultural context of the Malay community.

This study employs a qualitative approach using field research and ethnographic methods (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). This approach was chosen because the research focuses on gaining a deep understanding of socio-religious practices that naturally exist within the community, particularly within the Bele Kampong tradition. Ethnographic methods were used to explore the meanings, values, and religious experiences of the community through the researcher's direct involvement in the socio-cultural context under study (Sari et al., 2023).

The research was conducted in Lubuk Village, Kundur Subdistrict, Karimun Regency, Riau Islands Province. This location was selected because the community continues to actively practice the Bele Kampong tradition as part of its religious and cultural life. The research was conducted over approximately three months, from December 2025 to February 2026, including field observations, interviews, and documentation.

The research subjects consisted of seven key informants, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community members directly involved in the practice of the Bele Kampong tradition. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and

active involvement in the tradition, enabling them to provide relevant and in-depth information regarding the research focus.(Setiyani et al., 2026)

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques. First, participatory observation was carried out by directly engaging in community activities, particularly during the implementation of the Bele Kampong tradition, to observe ritual processes, symbolic elements, and social interactions that occurred within the community.(Fathoni, 2006)

In conducting the ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher assumed the role of a participant-observer. The researcher was directly involved in observing ritual activities while participating in several community activities related to the Bele Kampong tradition. This position enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings, values, and religious experiences embedded within the ritual practices. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community members to gain a comprehensive understanding of the meanings, values, and community perceptions associated with the tradition. The interviews were conducted flexibly using open-ended questions, allowing informants to explain their experiences and perspectives in detail (Arianto, 2024). Third, documentation was used to collect supporting data from written documents, archives, photographs, and visual recordings related to the implementation of the Bele Kampong tradition (Rukajat, 2018). To ensure data credibility, several validation techniques were employed, including source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community members. Method triangulation involved comparing findings derived from observations, interviews, and documentation. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by reconfirming several findings with key informants, while peer debriefing was used to minimize potential bias in data interpretation.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying data relevant to the research focus (Ahmad & Muslimah, 2021). Subsequently, the data were presented in a thematic descriptive format to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships among the findings. The final stage involved drawing interpretive conclusions by connecting the field findings with the theoretical framework of Islamic syncretism and contextual local theology (Rijali, 2018).

Finding and Discussion

The History of the Bele Kampong Tradition

The formation of the Bele Kampong tradition can be understood as a process of collective meaning construction rooted in shared cultural memory within the Lubuk Village community. Narratives associated with Nek Maryam's spiritual experience and the grave of Tok Janggut function not

merely as historical accounts, but as symbolic references that provide legitimacy for communal ritual practice. From an interpretive perspective, these narratives operate as cultural symbols through which the community organizes meaning and affirms the relationship between social life and a transcendent moral order.

Within the local cosmological framework, misfortunes such as illness, maritime accidents, and social disturbances are not interpreted as random events, but as meaningful signs of moral and spiritual imbalance. These occurrences are symbolically associated with the neglected grave of Tok Janggut, which is perceived as part of a disrupted moral order within the village (Itam, 2025). However, rather than remaining within a local cosmological explanation, these meanings are gradually reinterpreted within an Islamic theological framework emphasizing tawhid, where ultimate protection and causality are attributed solely to Allah SWT.

The ritual pilgrimage and subsequent communal practices reflect a shift in meaning from localized sacred cosmology toward Islamic monotheistic orientation. As emphasized by (Muhammad Fendi, 2025), communal religious expression in this tradition increasingly centers on supplication, gratitude, and reliance upon Allah SWT. In this sense, the tradition does not disappear but undergoes reinterpretation, where cultural symbols are reoriented within Islamic theological boundaries.

This process demonstrates that the Bele Kampong tradition represents a continuous transformation of meaning in which inherited cultural memory is not eliminated, but re-signified within an Islamic framework. In line with (Hefner, 2021), Islamic practice in Indonesia evolves through ongoing cultural interaction that reshapes symbolic systems without erasing them, but rather reconfiguring their meaning within Islamic monotheism.

Public Understanding of the Bele Kampong Tradition

Public understanding of the Bele Kampong tradition reflects an interpretive system in which ritual practices are embedded within both cultural and religious meaning structures. The tradition is not perceived merely as inherited custom, but as a symbolic medium through which the community expresses faith, prayer, and aspirations for protection within an Islamic worldview.

From an experiential perspective, participation in the ritual is associated with psychological and spiritual assurance. Community members interpret the ritual as a collective form of supplication to Allah SWT, generating a sense of inner peace and spiritual confidence. As expressed by (Misriyanti, 2025), participation in the ritual reinforces the belief that communal prayer contributes to divine protection. This indicates that the ritual functions as a

symbolic system through which spiritual meaning and emotional stability are constructed.

Beyond its spiritual dimension, the Bele Kampong tradition also operates as a mechanism of social cohesion. Collective participation strengthens solidarity, shared identity, and mutual trust among community members. This finding aligns with (Tahara et al., 2023), who emphasize that local religious practices contribute to cultural continuity while reinforcing social resilience amid social transformation.

Overall, public understanding of the tradition illustrates a process of meaning reconfiguration, in which cultural practices are continuously reinterpreted within Islamic values. The ritual thus functions not only as cultural heritage but also as a living system of meaning that integrates spiritual assurance, social cohesion, and religious expression in everyday life.

The Bele Kampong Traditional Ceremony

1. The Preparatory Phase of the Bele Kampong Tradition

The preparatory phase of the Bele Kampong tradition functions not merely as a stage of ritual readiness but also as a process through which social authority, collective memory, and religious values are organized and reproduced within the community. Prior to the implementation of the tradition, coordination takes place among tradition practitioners, religious leaders, village officials, and community members to ensure the continuity of the ritual.

The central role of Mak Itam as the tradition bearer reflects a form of culturally recognized authority, while the involvement of religious leaders provides religious legitimacy for the ritual process. Beyond its organizational function, this interaction facilitates the transmission and reinterpretation of ritual meanings across generations, enabling the tradition to remain relevant within the contemporary religious life of the community. This finding supports the argument of (Mustari et al., 2023), who emphasize that the participation of traditional leaders, religious figures, and local communities is essential for maintaining the legitimacy and continuity of Malay ritual traditions.

An important component of this preparatory phase is the pilgrimage to the grave of Tok Janggut, which serves as a symbolic link between the present community and its collective historical memory. According to Mak Itam, the pilgrimage is conducted before the ritual as a form of respect for the ancestors and as a prayer for the smooth implementation of the tradition and the well-being of the village community (Itam, 2025).

Although the grave occupies a significant place within the ritual structure, it is not perceived as a source of supernatural power. Instead, it functions as a cultural symbol that reinforces historical continuity, communal identity, and collective remembrance. The persistence of this practice demonstrates a transformation of meaning in which ancestral reverence is preserved as cultural memory while its theological

orientation is redirected toward prayer and dependence upon Allah SWT. This interpretation is consistent with Ningsih et al. (2016), who argue that grave visitation in Malay ritual traditions functions as a medium for preserving collective memory and strengthening communal identity without contradicting the principle of tawhid.

The preparation of ritual materials reflects the integration of social, cultural, and religious values within the community. Materials such as *bertih*, white rice, turmeric rice, pandan leaves, betel leaves, and lime are understood not merely as ritual objects but as cultural symbols through which prayers and aspirations for communal well-being are expressed. Community participation in preparing these materials reinforces cooperation, shared responsibility, and social solidarity among villagers. According to Muhammad Fendi (2025), this process represents a form of local theological praxis through which Islamic values are articulated within the cultural framework of the Malay community. The continued use of these materials demonstrates that local cultural forms are preserved while their meanings are reinterpreted as symbolic expressions of prayer and collective hope rather than objects possessing sacred or supernatural power. This finding is consistent with Sugiarto and Yusuf (2019), who describe ritual materials in Malay traditions as symbolic media for expressing collective hopes and spiritual aspirations.

Another important aspect of the preparatory phase is the observance of ritual taboos. Community members refrain from certain activities before and during the ritual period as a means of maintaining social discipline and respecting communal norms. Rather than being understood as mystical prohibitions, these restrictions function as ethical mechanisms that regulate social behavior and reinforce collective responsibility. Compliance with such norms contributes to maintaining social order and strengthening communal commitment to the continuity of the tradition. The reinterpretation of taboos from supernatural restrictions into ethical and social obligations illustrates an important process of ritual meaning transformation within the community. Similar findings were reported by Ardiansyah and Umam (2024), who found that ritual taboos in Malay communities function as instruments for regulating social conduct and preserving communal harmony during traditional ceremonies (Putri, 2024).

2. The Implementation Phase of the Bele Kampong Traditional Ceremony

a. The Four-Directional Call to Prayer

The four-directional call to prayer marks the beginning of the core ritual sequence in the Bele Kampong tradition. For the people of Lubuk Village, the recitation of the azan toward the four cardinal directions symbolizes a collective prayer for protection, safety, and well-being throughout the village. Rather than functioning solely as a ceremonial act, the ritual serves as a religious expression through

which the community articulates its dependence on Allah SWT and seeks divine protection for communal life.

Misriyanti explained that the four-directional azan is understood not only as part of a customary ritual but also as a medium through which religious beliefs are expressed within a local cultural context (Misriyanti, 2025). The practice therefore functions as a communal affirmation of faith, strengthening both spiritual awareness and collective confidence in facing everyday challenges.

From a contextual local theological perspective, the four-directional call to prayer demonstrates how local ritual forms are maintained while their meanings are interpreted through Islamic values. The symbolic orientation toward the four directions is no longer associated with supernatural powers or cosmological forces outside of God, but is understood as a collective supplication directed solely to Allah SWT. This finding is consistent with (Rohwati & Mamnuah, 2025), who explain that directional prayer rituals in Muslim coastal communities function as symbols of the interconnected relationship between humans, nature, and God while remaining grounded in Islamic religious understanding.

b. The Preparation of Bertih and the Making of Perfume

The preparation of ritual materials constitutes an important symbolic dimension of the Bele Kampong tradition. Materials such as bertih, white rice, turmeric rice, perfumed water, and incense are not understood merely as ceremonial objects, but as cultural media through which collective prayers, hopes, and aspirations for communal well-being are expressed. According to Mak Itam, these materials are prepared before the ritual because they accompany the community's supplication for safety, harmony, and protection within the village (Itam, 2025). The preparation process therefore reflects the integration of religious aspirations and cultural expressions that have been transmitted across generations within the Malay community.



Figure 1. Mak Itam arranges bertih, white rice, and turmeric rice

Within the community's interpretive framework, bertih, white rice, and turmeric rice function as symbolic representations of prosperity, gratitude, harmony, and the continuity of communal life. These materials do not operate as ritual substances endowed with inherent sacred power; rather, they acquire meaning through collective interpretation as expressions of prayer and social hope. This indicates a process in which ordinary food elements are transformed into religious-symbolic media through ritual practice. Meaning, therefore, is not inherent in the material object but constructed through shared theological understanding within the community. This finding is consistent with (Adinugraha & Al-Kasyaf, 2025), who emphasize that food in Muslim ritual contexts often functions as a symbolic vehicle for expressing collective aspirations and religious values.



Figure 2. Mak Itam Making Perfumed Water

The preparation of perfumed water represents another layer of symbolic meaning within the ritual structure. Misriyanti explained that perfumed water is understood as a symbol of purification and spiritual readiness before entering the core phase of the Bele Kampong tradition (Misriyanti, 2025). Rather than functioning as a substance with mystical efficacy, perfumed water is reinterpreted as a medium for expressing inner peace, gratitude, and supplication to Allah SWT. The use of natural elements such as pandan leaves, betel leaves, and lime further demonstrates how environmental resources are re-signified within a spiritual framework, shifting from material substances into symbolic representations of devotional preparation.



Figure 3. Mak Itam lighting the embers

The use of incense likewise illustrates the persistence of local ritual symbols that have undergone theological reinterpretation within an Islamic framework. Rosnani stated that incense is not perceived as a medium for communicating with supernatural entities, but as a symbolic element that fosters a solemn atmosphere for collective prayer and reflection (Rosnani, 2025). It indicates a clear shift in meaning from a pre-Islamic cosmological orientation toward an Islamic devotional context. Thus, incense is not eliminated from ritual practice, but its meaning is reconstructed as part of the emotional and spiritual atmosphere accompanying supplication to Allah SWT. This interpretation aligns with (Rosaliza et al., 2024), who argue that ritual symbols in Muslim societies often persist while their meanings are reconfigured in accordance with Islamic theological principles.

From a contextual local theological perspective, the continued use of bertih, rice, perfumed water, and incense demonstrates a gradual process of ritual meaning transformation. Local cultural symbols are preserved, but their theological orientation is redirected toward tawhid, resulting in a shift from perceived sacred objects to symbolic instruments of prayer and dependence upon Allah SWT. This transformation illustrates that cultural continuity and Islamic theology interact dynamically through reinterpretation rather than replacement.

c. Scattering of Bertih, Rice, and Fragrant Water Along the Beach

Researchers observed that the scattering of ritual materials such as bertih, white rice, turmeric rice, and perfumed water is carried out in a sequential procession led by the traditional practitioner. During the procession, Islamic prayers are recited at each stage, and participants follow the movement as a collective expression of devotion. In community understanding, this activity is perceived as a ritual that carries both symbolic and religious meanings rooted in local Islamic tradition.



Figure 4. Mak Itam preparing for the sowing process

In the image above, Mak Itam is seen sitting in front of ritual materials arranged on a cloth mat. Based on an interview with Ibu Misriyanti, the materials used in the procession such as betel leaves, white rice, and turmeric rice have been carefully prepared and placed in their respective containers prior to the ritual. The perfumed water is used together with the scattering process as Mak Itam begins moving along the shoreline (Misriyanti, 2025).

From a contextual local theological perspective, this stage represents a shift from symbolic preparation to embodied ritual practice. The act of scattering is not understood as the distribution of offerings to supernatural forces, but as a collective act of supplication directed to Allah SWT. The beach functions as a liminal space where human intention and divine supplication are symbolically articulated through physical movement.

At this stage, ritual objects that previously functioned as symbolic media (*bertih*, rice, and perfumed water) are no longer passive symbols, but become active instruments of meaning enactment. Their scattering signifies the transformation of prayer from internal intention into external, collective action. This demonstrates that ritual meaning is not static but emerges through embodied practice in communal space. This finding indicates a process of embodied ritual meaning transformation, where Islamic values of *tawhid* and supplication are expressed through culturally rooted forms without eliminating their local symbolic structure.

d. The Procession of the Fragrant Water

The researcher observed that the procession of sprinkling fragrant water was conducted in an orderly manner, without any recitation or practice that contradicts Islamic teachings. This stage occurs after the main ritual sequence has been completed and marks a transition toward the return of the community to daily life. The atmosphere remains solemn, but gradually shifts toward social normalcy.



Figure 5. The process of sprinkling scented water

As shown in the figure, Mak Itam stands in front of a seated villager while holding pandan leaves that have been soaked in perfumed water. According to Mak Itam, the leaves are gently directed toward the head, shoulders, and hands of participants as part of a symbolic blessing process (Itam, 2025). The movement is slow and deliberate, and is understood by the community as part of the ritual closing phase.

From a contextual local theological perspective, the sprinkling of perfumed water is not interpreted as a mystical act of purification, but as a symbolic affirmation of spiritual balance after collective supplication. The use of natural elements reflects the belief that cleanliness, harmony, and blessing are expressions of divine grace rather than inherent properties of material objects.

This stage also represents the internalization phase of ritual meaning transformation, in which symbolic meanings produced during earlier stages are absorbed into communal consciousness. The community does not merely complete a ritual, but re-enters social life with reinforced values of solidarity, gratitude, and spiritual awareness.

3. The Closing Phase of the Bele Kampong Tradition

a. Collective Prayer

Collective prayer marks the final expression of devotion, where participants jointly express gratitude and supplication to Allah SWT. According to Misriyanti, this practice strengthens both the vertical relationship between humans and God and the horizontal solidarity among community members (Misriyanti, 2025).

From a contextual local theological perspective, collective prayer represents the culmination of the meaning transformation process, where earlier symbolic and embodied meanings are unified into direct devotional expression centered on tawhid. At this stage, meaning is no longer mediated through ritual objects

but expressed as collective spiritual consciousness. This aligns with (Bimasakti, 2019), who highlights communal prayer as both a spiritual and social integration practice in Islamic life.

b. Shared Meals

Shared meals function as the social consolidation of the ritual, where communal relations are re-established after the completion of worship. According to Rosnani, this practice strengthens solidarity and togetherness among villagers (Rosnani, 2025). Analytically, communal meals reflect the internalization of ritual values into social life, where values such as gratitude, *ukhuwah*, and mutual care are embodied in everyday interaction. Thus, the ritual extends beyond symbolic expression into lived social ethics that reinforce communal cohesion.

Local Theological Values in the Bele Kampong Tradition

These local theological values are present in symbols and ritual practices that are interpreted as expressions of devotion and surrender to God in safeguarding the village's survival.

1. Cosmogony in the Bele Kampong Tradition

The cosmogonic dimension of the Bele Kampong tradition reflects a theocentric worldview in which safety, protection, and well-being are believed to originate solely from Allah SWT. Ritual elements such as incense and perfumed water are not understood as possessing supernatural power, but as symbolic media that facilitate collective supplication.

Incense functions to create a solemn atmosphere for prayer, while perfumed water symbolizes purification and spiritual readiness after ritual completion. Both elements demonstrate that material objects are not the source of protection, but only instruments that accompany human dependence on God. This indicates a shift from material-symbolic cosmology toward Islamic monotheistic consciousness. As supported by (Rohman et al., 2024), ritual objects in Muslim societies are increasingly reinterpreted as symbolic expressions of spiritual communication rather than mystical instruments. Thus, cosmogony in this tradition affirms that all forms of protection are ultimately determined by the will of Allah SWT.

2. Mythology in the Bele Kampong Tradition

Mythological elements appear in the practice of ancestral remembrance, particularly through grave visitation at Tok Janggut's tomb. This practice does not function as a belief in supernatural power,

but as a mechanism for preserving collective memory and reinforcing communal identity. The grave serves as a symbolic link between past and present generations, while ritual offerings represent respect for historical continuity rather than metaphysical dependence.

This reinterpretation shows that mythology in the Bele Kampong tradition has shifted from supernatural belief to cultural-historical consciousness. (Sakai, 2017) describes this phenomenon as “syncretic continuity,” where ancestral traditions are maintained but redefined within Islamic monotheistic boundaries. Thus, mythology functions as moral and historical reinforcement rather than a parallel belief system outside Islam.

3. Rituals and Ceremonies in the Bele Kampong Tradition

The ritual dimension is expressed through ceremonial actions involving symbolic food such as white glutinous rice and yellow rice. These materials represent sincerity, gratitude, and hope for divine blessings. White rice symbolizes purity of intention, while yellow rice reflects gratitude and communal joy. These materials are not treated as sacred substances, but as symbolic media of collective prayer.

This reflects the concept of “lived theology,” where religious values are embodied through everyday cultural practices. As noted by (Hirzi et al., 2025), ritual food in Muslim communities functions as a medium of spiritual expression and social solidarity. Therefore, ritual practice in the Bele Kampong tradition demonstrates that Islamic values are internalized through culturally grounded symbolic actions.

4. Symbolism in the Bele Kampong Tradition

Symbolism in this tradition is manifested through natural materials such as lime and pandan leaves. Lime symbolizes purity of intention and sincerity, while pandan leaves represent harmony between humans, society, and the environment. These symbols do not possess intrinsic sacred power, but function as cultural instruments for expressing moral and spiritual values.

This reflects the adaptability of Islam in engaging with local cultural forms, as emphasized by (Arif, 2015), where cultural symbols are accepted as long as they remain consistent with tawhid. Thus, symbolism in the Bele Kampong tradition serves as a pedagogical medium for internalizing Islamic values in social life.

5. The Concept of Nature in the Bele Kampong Tradition

The concept of nature in the Bele Kampong tradition reflects an Islamic ecological worldview in which nature is understood as part of Allah’s creation (ayat kauniyah) that carries spiritual and ethical significance. Nature is not positioned as an autonomous entity, but as a

manifestation of divine signs that require human responsibility and stewardship.

Ritual materials such as rice, betel leaves, and pandan leaves are derived from natural elements that are integrated into ceremonial practices. Within the community, these elements are not treated as sacred objects, but as representations of human dependence on nature and reminders of ecological responsibility. This indicates that the relationship between humans and nature in the Bele Kampong tradition is not exploitative, but relational and ethical.

Nature becomes a medium through which Islamic values of balance (mizan), stewardship (khilafah), and responsibility are internalized in social practice. As emphasized by (Salim, 1980), Islamic teachings position nature as a sign of divine greatness that must be preserved through ethical conduct. Thus, the concept of nature in this tradition demonstrates the emergence of Islamic ecological consciousness rooted in local wisdom, where environmental awareness is integrated with spiritual and theological understanding.

6. Ethics and Morality in the Bele Kampong Tradition

The ethical dimension is reflected in communal practices such as shared meals, ritual taboos, and collective responsibility. Communal eating symbolizes solidarity, compassion, and social cohesion among community members.

Ritual taboos function as mechanisms of social discipline that regulate behavior and maintain communal harmony. These practices demonstrate that ethics in the Bele Kampong tradition is not individualistic but communal, embedded within cultural rituals that reinforce social order. As stated by (Muqoyyidin, 2013), Islamic values in local traditions are internalized through cultural practices that shape social ethics and collective behavior. Thus, ethics and morality in this tradition reflect the integration of Islamic moral principles with local social structures.

Overall, the Bele Kampong tradition demonstrates a consistent theological transformation in which local cultural symbols are reinterpreted within an Islamic monotheistic framework. Rather than functioning as mystical objects, ritual practices operate as symbolic media of devotion, social cohesion, and ecological awareness. This confirms that the tradition represents a form of contextual Islamic expression where tawhid becomes the central axis of cultural meaning-making.

From the perspective of contextual local theology, these six dimensions demonstrate that Islamic teachings are not merely adopted formally but are continuously interpreted and negotiated through local cultural experiences

and social realities. In the Bele Kampong tradition, cultural symbols inherited from earlier generations are not abandoned; rather, their meanings are reoriented toward Islamic theological values. Elements such as ritual offerings, communal gatherings, prayers, and symbolic objects no longer function within their original cosmological framework but are reinterpreted as expressions of tawhid, gratitude, social solidarity, and collective devotion to God. This process reflects a contextual theological dynamic in which local culture serves not as a competing belief system but as a cultural medium through which Islamic values are translated, internalized, and practiced within the lived experiences of the Malay community. Therefore, the Bele Kampong tradition illustrates how contextual local theology operates through the transformation of cultural meanings while maintaining the fundamental principles of Islamic monotheism.

Transformation and Syncretic Reinterpretation of Islamic Values in the Bele Kampong Tradition

The findings reveal that all informants consistently interpret the Bele Kampong tradition as a form of collective supplication directed solely to Allah SWT. No significant opposition to the tradition was identified among the participants, and ritual elements such as incense, perfumed water, and other ceremonial materials were not perceived as possessing inherent sacred or supernatural power. Rather, these elements are understood as symbolic media for expressing prayer, gratitude, and social solidarity. The findings further demonstrate that the transformation of meaning within the Bele Kampong tradition occurs not through the elimination of cultural forms, but through the reinterpretation of their meanings within a tawhid-centered Islamic framework. Consequently, the tradition reflects a process of ritual meaning transformation in which cultural continuity is maintained while religious meanings are continuously reoriented toward Islamic values.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Bele Kampong tradition should not be understood as a fusion of religious systems, but as a continuous process of meaning transformation in which cultural symbols are progressively redefined within an Islamic monotheistic framework. In this process, meaning does not remain fixed in ritual objects, but is actively constructed through community interpretation, religious authority, and repeated ritual practice.

a. Symbolic Reinterpretation of Ritual Elements

Ritual symbols such as incense and perfumed water function as sites of meaning negotiation between inherited cultural cosmology and Islamic theological understanding. While these elements were

historically associated with metaphysical mediation in earlier Malay cosmological frameworks, in contemporary practice their meanings are reconstructed as supporting elements of collective supplication and ritual solemnity.

The transformation does not occur through replacement of material forms, but through redefinition of symbolic function. Incense and perfumed water therefore operate as culturally retained forms whose meanings are reoriented toward devotional expression within tawhid-centered belief. (Rehayati et al., 2025) affirm that in Malay-Islamic contexts, symbolic continuity is maintained while theological meaning is restructured through reinterpretation.

b. Reorientation of Cosmological Meaning

A similar transformation occurs at the cosmological level. Explanations of village safety that were previously linked to unseen forces or spiritual entities are no longer operational within community belief systems. Instead, safety is understood as entirely dependent upon Allah SWT.

This shift reflects a restructuring of explanatory authority, from plural cosmological agents to a singular theological source. Importantly, this does not represent the disappearance of local cosmological imagination, but its theological re-anchoring within Islamic monotheism. (Wang, 2022) notes that Islamization in Southeast Asia often functions through the re-signification of existing cosmological concepts rather than their elimination.

c. Ethical-Social Internalization as Embodied Meaning

At the ethical-social level, transformation occurs through lived ritual participation. Communal practices such as collective prayer and shared meals do not merely express social solidarity, but function as mechanisms of value embodiment, where Islamic principles such as tawhid, gratitude, patience, and ukhuwah are internalized through repeated social experience.

Through this process, religious values are not transmitted as external doctrines but are embedded within collective practice, shaping communal behavior and reinforcing moral cohesion. (Hakam, 2017) emphasizes that communal rituals in Indonesian Muslim societies function as spaces of ethical formation and social integration.

7. Analysis of the Bele Kampong Tradition from the Perspective of Contextual Local Theology

From the perspective of contextual local theology, the Bele Kampong tradition in Lubuk Village is understood as a process of ritual

meaning transformation rather than a form of syncretism between distinct belief systems. The findings show that cultural practices within the tradition do not exist as separate theological entities, but are continuously reinterpreted within an Islamic monotheistic framework centered on tawhid.

In this context, ritual meaning is not fixed within cultural objects, but is produced through the interaction between inherited tradition, religious interpretation, and collective ritual practice. Therefore, the meaning of the Bele Kampong tradition is constructed dynamically through a continuous process of reinterpretation and theological reorientation.

The analysis of the findings indicates that this transformation operates through three interconnected dimensions. At the symbolic level, cultural elements are preserved but their meanings are redefined from cosmological instruments into media of supplication and devotional expression. At the cosmological level, explanations of safety and misfortune shift from pre-Islamic understandings of unseen forces toward a monotheistic belief that all outcomes are determined solely by Allah SWT. At the ethical-social level, ritual participation functions as a means of internalizing Islamic values such as tawhid, gratitude, patience, and ukhuwah through lived communal experience.

These dimensions demonstrate that ritual meaning in the Bele Kampong tradition is formed through a continuous cycle of reinterpretation, religious reorientation, and social internalization. Cultural elements are not eliminated, but repositioned within an Islamic epistemological structure.

Based on this pattern, this study formulates a conceptual understanding that the transformation of ritual meaning in the Bele Kampong tradition occurs through a sequential process consisting of cultural inheritance, ritual practice, interpretive negotiation, theological reorientation toward tawhid, and internalization of Islamic values in social life. This conceptual understanding indicates that the Bele Kampong tradition functions as a dynamic system of meaning construction, in which local culture becomes the medium through which Islamic values are expressed, reinforced, and embedded in communal life. Consistent with (Ubaidillah & Marpuah, 2021) this process reflects how local traditions in Muslim societies persist in cultural form while undergoing deep semantic transformation aligned with Islamic theological principles.

Conclusion

The Bele Kampong tradition in Lubuk Village is a collective ritual practice carried out in a structured sequence from preparation to closing. It functions not only as a cultural ceremony but also as a form of communal prayer for safety, protection, and blessings, particularly in preparation for Ramadan.

The study identifies six dimensions of local theological values in the tradition: cosmogony, mythology, rituals and ceremonies, symbolism, concepts of nature, and ethics and morality. These dimensions show that the community understands the village as a shared living space that must be maintained through prayer, solidarity, and moral responsibility. Although traces of earlier cosmological interpretations still exist, they have been reinterpreted within an Islamic monotheistic framework centered on Allah SWT. Ritual symbols such as incense and ritual water are preserved but function as media of meaning rather than objects of sacred power.

Overall, the tradition reflects a process of Islamic value transformation in which tawhid, tawakkal, gratitude, and ukhuwah are internalized through lived cultural practice. This demonstrates that Islam in Lubuk Village develops through cultural dialogue rather than cultural replacement.

This study contributes to contextual local theology by showing that local traditions can serve as vehicles for internalizing Islamic values within community life. It also highlights the dialogical relationship between Islam and Malay culture, which remains adaptive and continuously evolving.

This study is limited to a single case in Lubuk Village and relies on qualitative interpretation, which may not fully represent broader regional variations. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across Malay coastal communities and to apply interdisciplinary approaches to deepen understanding of Islamic cultural transformation in local traditions.

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