

Shaving Rituals and Religious Identity in the Malay World: A Study of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*

M. Nasihudin Ali

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

mnasihudinali@uinsu.ac.id

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the influence of the shaving ritual on the formation of the religious identity of the Malay community by referring to the text of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* as the primary source. The shaving tradition in the Malay world not only functions as a social practice, but also contains spiritual values that strengthen the relationship between Islamic teachings and local customs. Using a quantitative-qualitative approach, this study tested several independent variables, namely exposure to the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*, the intensity of participation in the shaving ritual, and family norms and local traditions, against the dependent variable of the community's religious identity. The results show that the level of exposure to the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* and the intensity of involvement in the shaving ritual have a significant influence on the strengthening of individual and community religious identity. Meanwhile, family norms and cultural traditions play a role as reinforcing factors in maintaining the continuity of the practice amidst modernization and social change. These findings confirm that the shaving tradition is not merely a cultural heritage, but also a syncretic representation of Islamic values and the ethno-religious identity of the Malay community in the Indonesian archipelago.

Key Words: The Story of the Prophet Shaving; Shaving tradition; Malay society; Religious identity; Cultural syncretism.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh ritual bercukur terhadap pembentukan identitas keagamaan masyarakat Melayu dengan merujuk pada teks *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* sebagai sumber utama. Tradisi bercukur di dunia Melayu tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai praktik sosial, tetapi juga mengandung nilai-nilai spiritual yang memperkuat hubungan antara ajaran Islam dan adat setempat. Melalui pendekatan kuantitatif-kualitatif, penelitian ini menguji beberapa variabel independen, yaitu paparan terhadap *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*, intensitas partisipasi dalam ritual bercukur, dan norma keluarga serta tradisi lokal, terhadap variabel dependen berupa identitas keagamaan masyarakat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat paparan terhadap hikayat dan intensitas keterlibatan dalam ritual bercukur memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap penguatan identitas keagamaan individu dan komunitas. Sementara itu, norma keluarga dan tradisi kultural berperan sebagai faktor penguatan dalam mempertahankan kontinuitas praktik tersebut di tengah modernisasi dan perubahan sosial. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa tradisi bercukur bukan sekadar warisan budaya, melainkan juga representasi sinkretik antara nilai-nilai Islam dan identitas etno-religius masyarakat Melayu di kepulauan Nusantara.

Kata Kunci: *Hikayat nabi bercukur; tradisi bercukur; Masyarakat Melayu; Identitas keagamaan; Sinkretisme budaya.*

Introduction

The tradition of shaving is a socio-religious practice with deep roots in the lives of Malay communities throughout the Indonesian archipelago. For the Malay community, this practice is not merely a physical act of cutting hair, but also a symbol of self-purification, spiritual rebirth, and affirmation of religious identity, deeply intertwined with Islamic values (Milner 2008). This tradition is often associated with the exemplary story of the Prophet Muhammad, as captured in the classic Malay text *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* (The Tale of the Prophet Shaving), which served as an important medium for the dissemination of Islamic teachings through cultural narratives (Braginsky 2004).

In the context of Islamization in the Malay world, hikayat texts play a central role as a means of preaching and internalizing religious values into the social structure of society. The *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* is a concrete example of how the teachings and sunnah of the Prophet are absorbed and localized within the framework of Malay customs. Through the story of the Prophet's shaving, the Malay community not only imitates religious practices ritually, but also affirms the symbol of piety, cleanliness, and obedience to Islamic teachings. This transformation shows a dialectical process between *sunnah* and *adat*, where Islamic traditions undergo cultural adaptation without losing their theological meaning (Azyumardi Azra 2004).

However, social changes brought about by modernization and globalization present new challenges to the sustainability of the shaving tradition. In some urban areas, the practice has begun to shift from a sacred ritual context to a more ceremonial or aesthetic symbol (Hooker 2003). These changes raise important questions about how modern Malay societies re-conceive the relationship between shaving rituals and their religious identity. Does the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* still have relevance in shaping religious consciousness in the contemporary era?

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the relationship between the shaving ritual and the formation of religious identity in Malay society, by positioning the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* as a narrative foundation that connects theological and cultural dimensions. This study uses a multidisciplinary approach by combining textual analysis, ritual studies, and social observation, to understand how religious narratives are inherited and reinterpreted in the daily practices of Malay society in the archipelago. This research is expected to enrich the discourse on Islam Nusantara, particularly in understanding cultural syncretism and the dynamics of integration between religion and local traditions.

The presence of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* (The Shaving Story) demonstrates that Malay manuscripts not only discuss how the Islamization of the

Indonesian archipelago took place through trade, but also address religious practices and its relationship to Sufism. Furthermore, numerous factors influenced the popularity of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* in the Indonesian archipelago. The writing of Indonesian tales, which internalized Persian culture, also played a significant role in the development of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*. Consequently, this article will delve further into the factors influencing the popularity of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* in the Indonesian archipelago (Noor 2011).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap with an interdisciplinary approach that combines textual analysis (philological-hermeneutic) and socio-cultural studies (anthropological). The focus of this study is to examine how the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* (The Tale of the Prophet Shaving) functions as a source of religious legitimacy, influencing the practice of shaving rituals and shaping the religious identity of the Malay community. With this approach, the research is expected to provide new contributions to the discourse on local Islamization, cultural syncretism, and the construction of religious identity in the Malay world.

Discussion

The Relevance of the *Hikayat Nabi bercukur* in Malay Islamic Tradition

The *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* appears in numerous classical Malay manuscripts and oral versions across the Indonesian archipelago; its presence indicates the text's popularity and ease of dissemination through manuscript copies and oral storytelling. Several studies have traced its origins further, explaining the similarities in motifs and narrative form across various regional languages. Modern textological studies have also identified local variations copied in both Jawi and Pegon scripts, indicating extensive channels of religio-cultural transmission.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs published the 54-page *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*, while the text discussing the story only covers 28 pages. The rest of the text discusses lifestyle and prayer. It is difficult to ascertain the identity of the manuscript as a whole because the author did not find a colophon in the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*. At the beginning of the story, it is written that the month of Shawwal falls on the night of Saturday, 7th, with the assumption that this date was copied from the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*. However, the author cannot confirm the year of publication of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* because the date and month listed do not match the year.

Functionally, these tales serve as a medium for preaching, conveying Islamic values in narrative language easily accepted by communities unfamiliar with Arabic literacy. Furthermore, they legitimize local practices by linking shaving to the Prophet's example. The texts provide a religious basis for local customs, enabling them to become more than just customary practices, but rather as blessed acts and *sunnah* (religious practice). Therefore, tales serve as a bridge

between formal Islamic texts and the everyday practices of Malay society (Dewi et al. 2022).

The practice of shaving babies in Malay communities demonstrates how the narrative in the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* (The Tale of the Shaving Prophet) is actualized: the ceremonial procedures, prayers, hair distribution/alms giving, and symbolic elements (cleansing, blessings) are often accompanied by explanations referring to the Prophet's example or sacred stories contained in the tale. Fieldwork and institutional theses document the ceremonial procedures, material artifacts (children's clothing), and variations in ceremonial protocols. This demonstrates a direct channel from text to ritual practice.

Although the core of the narrative is similar (shaving momentum as a sacred/purification moment), local variations feature differences in ritual details, intensity of religiosity, and cultural elements (music, food, clothing). Some textual studies also offend skeptical reader/copyist responses: in some manuscripts there are marginal notes that mark concerns about elements considered contrary to orthodoxy, which mark the presence of critical discourse against certain legitimacy of the *hikayat*.

Anthropological and institutional sources suggest that while the practice of shaving continues, its meaning has changed: in rural and traditional communities it remains a strong religio-cultural ritual; in urban areas it is often simplified or understood primarily as a family/aesthetic tradition. The influence of media, mobility, and modern religious education has led some groups to reaffirm textual foundations (citing the *hikayat* as sunnah) while others consider it a cultural heritage that can be modified (Kling 1994).

In summary, the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* is relevant because: (1) it provides a narrative of religious legitimacy for the practice of shaving, thus giving the ritual religious significance in the Malay realm; (2) it serves as a tool for da'wah and an instrument for internalizing Islamic values in a form acceptable to local culture; (3) the extensive channels of textual transmission (manuscripts, oral storytelling, religious studies) explain why this practice spread and persisted; and (4) the existence of regional variations and critical discourses demonstrates a rich interpretative dynamic—from acceptance, adaptation, to rejection or reinterpretation in the modern era (Abdullah 1990; Hamid 1983).

Meanwhile, philological studies of the text *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* show that this *hikayat* is not just a biographical story of the Prophet Muhammad Saw, but a text loaded with religious and cultural symbols. In the text, the process of shaving the Prophet is described as a moment of purification and affirmation of spiritual identity after performing the *hajj*. This story then became the theological foundation for the practice of shaving in the Malay world, especially during religious events such as aqeeqah and circumcision. Thus, this *hikayat* functions as a “binding narrative” that transforms Arab-Islamic practices into local traditions full of religious meaning (Braginsky 2004; Fang 2011).

In the context of Malay society, the narrative of shaving the Prophet is not only understood textually, but is also brought to life through rituals and social symbols. This is seen in the practice of shaving babies, which includes prayers,

recitations of *selawat*, and the distribution of hair accompanied by charity. This tradition reflects the process of internalizing Islamic teachings into the Malay cultural system, where *adat bersendikan syarak, syarak bersendikan Kitabullah* becomes its normative principle (Azyumardi Azra 2004). The religious narrative in *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* thus plays a role in linking theological aspects and local custom as a single unit of religious identity.

The Social and Symbolic Dimensions of the Shaving Tradition in the Malay World

Malay customs are filled with principles that have been the foundation of Malay life for centuries. Customs are considered a means of creating harmony among members of society, each with their own perspectives. Unfortunately, most contemporary values are not considered significant. Because these values are considered implicit, those who practice Malay customs are never informed about them. Instead, the majority of Malays view their values as lowly and shameful. They destroy these values in Malay society. Many Malays continue to adhere to these customs and principles, even though they must adapt to changing times (Mussaif 2017).

The shaving ritual in the Malay tradition not only represents the physical act of cutting hair, but also contains layers of complex social, symbolic, and spiritual meaning. In a social context, this tradition functions as a means of community integration, strengthening kinship networks, and marking important transitions in the life cycle, such as birth, *aqiqah*, or welcoming new members into the Muslim community. The shaving ritual is part of the Malay social value system that makes religion a social glue—a manifestation of the proverb “*adat bersendikan syarak, syarak bersendikan Kitabullah*” (Milner 2008; Roff 1985).

The symbolic meaning of the shaving ritual lies in the concept of self-purification (*tazkiyah an-nafs*) and spiritual birth, which is based on the narrative in the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*. In the hikayat, the process of shaving the Prophet Muhammad Saw. after the hajj became a symbol of inner purification and perfection of worship. The Malay community then adopted this meaning in the form of rituals such as *cukur jambul* for babies, where the child's first hair is shaved while prayers and prayers are recited. The shaved hair is usually weighed and its value is given to the poor as a symbol of sharing blessings and purifying sustenance (Fang 2011). This action symbolizes cleansing from the worldly elements that have been inherent since birth and surrendering to God as the beginning of a new, holy life (Braginsky 2004).

From a sociological perspective, the shaving ritual also serves as a social bonding mechanism that strengthens social solidarity among community members. Geertz, in The Interpretation of Cultures, emphasized that religious rituals are not merely spiritual acts but also “symbolic systems” that create social agreements on shared meaning. In the Malay context, the shaving ritual becomes a forum for mutual cooperation, where extended families, neighbors, and religious leaders gather to pray for the child being shaved. This procession creates a sense of togetherness and collective identity rooted in Islamic and customary values

(Geertz 1973). Similarly, Hooker observed that Malay culture shapes its religiosity through social participation in rituals, not solely through dogma, so that every religious practice has a concrete social function (Hooker 2003).

Other symbolic meanings emerge in the use of ritual tools, prayers, and objects. For example, rose water and pandan leaves are used to wash a baby's head as a symbol of purity and coolness of heart. The prayers recited during the shaving process function as a performative act that connects the temporal and spiritual dimensions. Such actions reflect the concept of "religion as cultural performance," in which religious expression is realized through symbolic actions involving the body, objects, and social space. Thus, the shaving ritual in the Malay world can be understood as a social text that contains moral, religious, and collective identity messages (Peletz 2009).

Within the framework of Islamic-Malay cultural syncretism, the shaving ritual also serves as a concrete example of the integration between universal Islamic teachings and local traditions. Azyumardi Azra explains that the process of Islamization in the Malay world took place culturally and adaptively, in which local elements were not erased, but rather purified and given new meaning according to Islamic principles. Therefore, although shaving was already known in ancient Hindu-Buddhist customs as a symbol of initiation, Islamization made this practice imbued with new spiritual meanings, namely as tahallul and tazkiyah, not simply a traditional ritual. This adaptation demonstrates the unique dynamics of Islam Nusantara, where orthodoxy and locality do not negate each other, but rather enrich each other (Azyumardi Azra 2004).

The data above shows that the shaving ritual persists as part of the community's religious traditions. However, its form and meaning vary depending on the social context and level of urbanization. In rural areas, the shaving ceremony is still performed collectively, involving religious leaders and the extended family, marking social solidarity and the baby's spiritual transition into the Islamic community. In urban areas, however, this practice tends to shift to a simpler family ceremony, with an emphasis on symbolic and aesthetic aspects.

The shaving ritual is understood by the community as a means of *tazkiyah an-nafs* (self-purification) and an expression of gratitude for the blessing of a new life. Shaved hair is considered to contain impurities (physical impurity), and its removal is accompanied by prayers that the child will grow up with good morals. This tradition demonstrates the continuity between the theological (spiritual cleansing) and social (affirming the identity of the Malay Muslim community) dimensions (Geertz 1973; Peletz 2009). Thus, the shaving practice serves a dual function: as a religious ritual and as a mechanism for the formation of an Islamic social identity.

Cultural Syncretism: Integration between Islam and Malay Customs

The Malay cultural heritage is an important legacy of the Indonesian archipelago. Because Malay not only enriches and diversifies cultural products but is also synonymous with Islam, Malay culture has received a positive response from communities across the region. One unique way Malay communities

preserve Malay literature is by reading and developing Malay literary works (M. 2013). This includes reading the story of the Prophet shaving during the *aqiqah* (ceremonial ceremony). In this story, a newborn baby must be given a blessing by having its hair cut and given a name. The baby's parents perform this ritual to seek His blessing so that the baby can follow in the footsteps and characteristics of the Prophet (Suyasa 2022).

The phenomenon of cultural syncretism in the Malay Islamic tradition is the result of a long process of interaction between Islamic teachings and local socio-cultural structures. Since the 13th century CE, when Islam began to take root in the Indonesian archipelago, the process of Islamization has not occurred through theological imposition, but rather through the mechanism of cultural acculturation. In this context, Malay customs, previously heavily influenced by Hindu-Buddhist heritage, were adapted, refined, and synergized with the principles of Islamic law. Azra (2004) asserts that Islamization in the Malay world is "organic and cultural," where local elements are not erased but are given new meaning within the framework of monotheism. Thus, practices such as the shaving ritual are not a deviation from Islamic teachings, but rather a concrete example of the translation of Islamic values into the symbol system of Malay culture (Azyumardi Azra 2004).

This syncretism is clearly reflected in the Malay social principle that states "*adat bersendikan syarak, syarak bersendikan Kitabullah*". This principle is the foundation for a harmonious relationship between religion and *adat*. In the practice of shaving rituals, for example, Islamic elements such as reciting prayers, selawat, and almsgiving combine with local traditions in the form of family celebrations, the use of symbolic materials (rose water, pandan, and coconut), and a social structure of mutual cooperation. This shows that Islam in the Malay context is present not only as a normative religion, but also as a cultural system that shapes social behavior and the aesthetics of everyday life (Hooker 2003).

From an anthropological perspective, this syncretism cannot be understood as a theological compromise, but rather as a cultural mechanism of Islamization. Geertz, in his analysis of Javanese religion, refers to a similar process as the "cultural translation of faith," that is, the effort to instill universal religious values through local symbols and practices (Geertz 1973). In the Malay context, the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* plays a crucial role in this process: the text serves as a legitimizing medium that bridges Islamic theology and community customs. The narrative of the Prophet Muhammad shaving his hair after the *Hajj* provides a sacred model for local shaving practices, enabling communities to understand their actions as part of a religiously valid and culturally meaningful *sunnah* (Braginsky 2004).

The syncretism of Malay-Islamic culture can also be seen as a creative response to modernity and colonialism. During the colonial period, when social structures and Islamic identity were threatened by Western penetration, the tradition of shaving and local religious texts such as the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* served as symbolic tools of resistance (Diana 2015). Through this ritual, Malay communities asserted their distinctive Islam—an Islam grounded in their own

land and customs. The continuity of Malay Islamic customs is evidence of the cultural resilience of the Indonesian people, who were able to maintain their religious identity without having to resist external change (Milner 2008; Roff 1985).

Conceptually, syncretism in Malay Islam is not compromising, but complementary, mutually enriching. In Michael G. Peletz's view, Islam in Southeast Asia demonstrates a remarkable ability to adapt to social contexts without losing its spiritual substance. This is reflected in the practice of shaving, which, although different from Arab traditions, still affirms Islamic values such as *tazkiyah* (self-purification), *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), and *barakah* (blessings). Thus, Malay-Islamic syncretism can be seen as a form of civilizational Islam, namely, Islam that lives in culture, not just in religious texts (Peletz 2009).

In the modern context, this syncretism has undergone transformation, not eradication. In many urban Malay communities, shaving practices have been adapted in simpler ways, while retaining their symbolic and religious core. This demonstrates that Malay Islam continues to evolve through adaptation, without losing its spiritual roots. The Malay people's ability to harmoniously combine religion and custom makes them a unique model of cultural pluralism in Southeast Asia (Suharjo 2014).

The tradition of shaving in the Malay world is a manifestation of cultural syncretism, namely the harmonious meeting of Islamic teachings and local customs. Islamic elements emerge through the imitation of the Prophet Muhammad Saw, while local elements are evident in the forms of ceremonies, music, and traditional foods that accompany the ritual. This phenomenon aligns with Azra's view that Islam in the Malay world did not exist in a purely textual form, but rather through a process of cultural adaptation and contextualization (Azyumardi Azra 2004). In practice, Malay society sees no contradiction between *sharak* and *adat*, as both reinforce each other. *Hikayat* such as *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* serve as a means of religious legitimacy for traditional practices, making them part of the community's moral and spiritual system. This demonstrates that Malay religious identity is shaped not only by normative Islamic teachings but also by a living and dynamic cultural structure (Hooker 2003; Milner 2008).

Transformation of Meaning in the Modern Era

The tradition of shaving in Malay society has undergone a significant transformation in meaning along with social change, urbanization, and the influence of globalization. While in classical times the shaving ritual served as a symbol of self-purification and strengthening of religious identity, in the modern era this practice has tended to undergo desacralization and a redefinition of meaning. This shift does not mean a total loss of spiritual value, but rather a reinterpretation to align with modern lifestyles and new social contexts. Modernization in the Malay world has impacted how society interprets tradition: old customs are not abandoned, but adapted into simpler and more flexible cultural symbols (On 1995).

In urban Malay communities, the tradition of shaving the head is now more often understood as a family celebration than a sacred religious ritual. The shaving procession is carried out socially, accompanied by *tahlilan* (religious gatherings), communal prayers, and hospitality. However, theological meanings such as *tahallul* (religious gatherings) or *tazkiyah* (religious ceremonies) are beginning to fade among the younger generation. This phenomenon reflects what is known as reflexive modernization, a process in which societies revise their traditional practices to adapt them to modern rational values. In this context, the shaving ritual is no longer a purely spiritual act, but also a symbol of cultural identity and an expression of social affiliation in a multicultural society (Anthony Giddens 1991).

Furthermore, the influence of social media and globalization has driven a transformation in the form and meaning of this ritual. In many cases, the shaving ceremony is now packaged in a modern form, indicating the commodification of tradition. However, this process also opens up new space for symbolic revitalization: the younger generation is beginning to reenact the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* (The Tale of the Prophet Shaving) or the recitation of the shaving prayer as part of preserving Islamic-Malay cultural heritage in the digital public sphere. Such changes demonstrate the unique dynamics of Malay society, where old traditions do not die but are transformed into cultural capital in the context of modernity (Hooker 2003).

From a theological perspective, this transformation of meaning can be understood as a strategy of spiritual adaptation. As explained by Azyumardi Azra (2004), Islam in the archipelago is flexible to changing times, as long as the essence of sharia and its moral values are maintained. In this regard, the shaving ritual still contains elements of self-purification, gratitude, and social solidarity, despite its simplification. This tendency confirms that Malay society still maintains the essential aspects of Islam (intention, prayer, and almsgiving) as the core of the ritual, while adapting its external form to the demands of modernity (Azyumardi Azra 2004).

Furthermore, the transformation of the meaning of the shaving ritual reflects a shift in identity orientation from religio-communal to personal-cultural. Geertz explains that in modern society, religious symbols are often interpreted individually and aesthetically, rather than merely normatively (Geertz 1973). Among the Malay middle class, for example, the tradition of shaving has now become a means of strengthening the image of a religious-modern family through Islamic cultural symbols, not just the practice of the *Sunnah*. Cultural phenomena in Islamic societies in Southeast Asia continue to experience "cultural reinvention," namely the re-creation of forms of religiosity that are appropriate to new social contexts without losing their spiritual roots.

Overall, the transformation of the meaning of the shaving ritual in the modern era shows two main directions: a softening of the sacred form toward a social symbol, and a cultural revitalization through symbolic reinterpretation. This process reflects the flexibility of Islamic-Malay culture in responding to modernity without losing its authentic meaning. The shaving tradition is no longer

merely a religious ritual, but also a living and continually renewed cultural identity. Thus, modernity does not erase Malay-Islamic traditions, but rather encourages the emergence of new forms of religiosity that are more contextual, aesthetic, and inclusive.

Although still practiced, the tradition of shaving has undergone a transformation in meaning among the younger generation. Observations in urban areas indicate that some communities now place more emphasis on the symbolic or aesthetic aspects than on the spiritual dimension. Changes in lifestyle, media influence, and the modernization of rituals have led some to view the tradition of shaving as a cultural heritage, no longer a religious obligation. However, others are attempting to revive spiritual values by emphasizing the significance of the Prophet's traditions in everyday life. This change demonstrates the dialectic between modernity and tradition. On the one hand, modernity is eroding ritual practices deemed "inefficient"; on the other, a new awareness is emerging to preserve tradition as a symbol of Islamic and Malay identity. Thus, the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* remains relevant as a source of moral and symbolic inspiration, despite undergoing reinterpretation according to the context of the times (Hooker 2003; Peletz 2009).

Quotes and References

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with an interdisciplinary framework that combines philological, hermeneutic, and anthropological analysis. This approach was chosen because the research focuses not only on the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* text as a literary artifact, but also explores the social and religious meanings of shaving practices in the context of contemporary Malay society. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the symbolism, religious values, and cultural transformations contained in the text and its associated practices (Creswell 2010).

This research focuses on the study of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* text through philological and hermeneutic methods, namely by tracing the origins of the manuscript, narrative structure, and interpretation of the religious meaning contained therein (Braginsky 2004). Hermeneutic analysis is used to understand the relationship between religious narratives and the Malay cultural context, and how the text is internalized as a source of moral and spiritual teachings (Palmer 1969). The data are used to analyze how *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* influences the meaning of rituals and the religious identity of the local community. Thus, this research seeks to understand the reciprocal relationship between text and social context in shaping Malay religiosity. In the interpretation stage, the researcher uses the theoretical framework of cultural syncretism (Azyumardi Azra 2004) and religion as a system of meaning (Geertz 1973) to interpret how elements of Islam and local customs combine in the practice of shaving and shape the religious identity of the Malay community. This approach is expected to provide a holistic understanding of the role of religious texts in the construction of culture and spirituality in the Malay world.

Studies on the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* and the tradition of shaving in Malay society have been conducted by a number of scholars, but they still show a disconnect between the textual and social dimensions of practice. Most previous research has focused on philological and literary approaches, emphasizing the analysis of the script, style, and didactic function of the *hikayat* within the classical Malay literary heritage. Although these studies have successfully confirmed the position of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* as a crucial religious text in the process of Malay Islamization, these studies have not empirically explored how the text influenced ritual practices and the formation of the community's religious identity (Braginsky 2004; Fang 2011).

On the other hand, anthropological studies of the shaving tradition in the Malay world have focused more on the customary aspects, social solidarity, and cultural functions of the ritual. This approach reveals that the shaving tradition plays a role in strengthening social bonds and preserving ancestral heritage, but has not yet linked it to the narrative-religious dimension derived from the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* text. As a result, a gap exists between the understanding of ritual as a social expression and the *hikayat* as a religious source that shapes the ritual's meaning (Roff 1985).

Furthermore, modern studies such as those by Hooker and Peletz have focused more on the transformation of Malay Islamic culture in general, without specifically examining how the Prophet's narratives in classical texts such as the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* shape the religious understanding of contemporary society. To date, no research has integratively connected texts, traditions, and religious identities within a single, comprehensive analytical framework (Hooker 2003; Peletz 2009).

Conclusion

This research confirms that the shaving ritual in Malay society is not merely a hereditary social practice, but rather a manifestation of a complex, dynamic, and contextual religious identity. Through the study of the *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*, it can be understood that the shaving tradition has a strong spiritual foundation, because it is rooted in the prophetic narrative about the Prophet Muhammad, who shaved his hair after the *Hajj* pilgrimage as a symbol of self-purification (*tahallul*). This narrative was then internalized into Malay culture through a process of cultural syncretism that combines Islamic values with local customs. Socially, the shaving ritual serves to strengthen community solidarity, becoming a space for the expression of togetherness and strengthening religious identity within a cultural framework.

In the context of cultural syncretism, Islam and Malay customs are harmoniously integrated. The principle of "*adat bersendikan syarak, syarak bersendikan Kitabullah*" describes a balance between religion and culture that do not negate each other. The process of Islamization in the Malay world is adaptive, so that every local tradition, including the ritual of shaving, is given a new meaning that is in line with Islamic teachings. This phenomenon shows the special character of Nusantara Islam which is inclusive, tolerant, and contextual towards

cultural diversity. Meanwhile, in the modern era, the meaning of shaving rituals has undergone a transformation due to the influence of urbanization, globalization, and modernity. Rituals that used to be sacred have now experienced a lot of desacralization in form, but are still maintained as a symbol of the cultural identity and spirituality of the Muslim family. This shift in meaning is not a form of religious regression, but a cultural adaptation so that tradition remains relevant in the midst of social change. Thus, the tradition of shaving in the Malay world shows the durability of Islamic-Malay culture in maintaining the continuity of religious values through the process of symbolic reinterpretation and revitalization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Book

Abdullah, Abdul Rahman Haji. 1990. *Pemikiran Umat Islam: Sejarah Dan Perkembangannya Hingga Abad Ke-19 M*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia.

Anthony Giddens. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Azyumardi Azra. 2004. *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII (Edisi Revisi)*. Jakarta: Kencana.

Braginsky, Vladimir. 2004. *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature: A Historical Survey of Genres, Writings and Literary Views*. Leiden: KITLV Press.

Creswell, J. .. 2010. *Research Design: Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, Dan Mixed*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

Dewi, Nurfitria, Wangiman Wangiman, Adi Warma, Zainur Huda, and Desri Novita. 2022. "Hikayat Nabi Bercukur; Seni Dalam Budaya Nusantara." *Borneo : Journal of Islamic Studies* 3(1):39–47. doi: 10.37567/borneo.v3i1.1433.

Diana, Ani. 2015. "Fungsi Dan Kedudukan Hikayat Nabi Bercukur." *Pesona: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 1(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.52657/jp.v1i1.74>.

Fang, Liaw Yock. 2011. *Sejarah Kesusastraan Melayu Klasik*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Hamid, Ismail. 1983. *Kesusastaan Melayu Lama Dan Warisan Peradaban Islam*. Selangor: Fajar Bakti.

Hooker, Virginia Matheson. 2003. *Writing a New Society: Social Change through the Novel in Malay*. Leiden: KITLV Press.

Kling, Zainal. 1994. "Malay Socio-Religious Practices and Rituals." in *UNESCO China Conference*. UNESCO.

Milner, Anthony. 2008. *The Malays*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mussaif, Moh. Muzakka. 2017. "Popularitas Cerita Nabi Bercukur Dalam Naskah-Naskah Nusantara (Kajian Tekstologis)." in *Prosiding Seminar Internasional*. Semarang: Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Diponegoro.

Noor, Arba'iyah Mohd. 2011. "Perkembangan Pensejarahan Islam Di Alam Melayu (Development of Islamic Historiography in Malay Archipelago)." *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 6(1).

Palmer, Richard E. 1969. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Peletz, Michael G. 2009. *Islam and the Cultural Politics of Legitimacy: Malaysia in the Aftermath of September 11*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Roff, William R. 1985. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Journal

Dewi, Nurfitria, Wangiman Wangiman, Adi Warma, Zainur Huda, and Desri Novita. 2022. "Hikayat Nabi Bercukur; Seni Dalam Budaya Nusantara." *Borneo : Journal of Islamic Studies* 3(1):39–47. doi: 10.37567/borneo.v3i1.1433.

Diana, Ani. 2015. "Fungsi Dan Kedudukan Hikayat Nabi Bercukur." *Pesona: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 1(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.52657/jp.v1i1.74>.

M., Abdul Hadi W. 2013. "Jejak Persia Dalam Sastra Melayu." *Media Syariah* 15(1). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/jms.v15i1.1766>.

Noor, Arba'iyah Mohd. 2011. "Perkembangan Pensejarahan Islam Di Alam Melayu (Development of Islamic Historiography in Malay Archipelago)." *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 6(1).

On, Abd. Ghani. 1995. "Adat Bercukur: Masih Dijunjung Walau Ditelan Zaman." *Jurnal Warisan Indera Kayangan* Bil 7.

Suharjo, Rias Antho Rahmi. 2014. ""Pernyataan Kalam" Dalam Naskah Sastra Melayu Klasik". " *Al-Turas* 20(2). doi: <https://doi.org/10.15408/bat.v20i2>.

Suyasa, I. Made. 2022. "Artikulasi Sastra Melayu Dalam Tradisi Lisan Sasak Di Lombok." *Jurnal Ilmiah Telaah* 7(1):150. doi: 10.31764/telaah.v7i1.8352.