



# Criticism of the Interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Scriptures on the Practice of Sea Alms in the Context of the Purification of the Sundanese Faith

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## Abstract

This article examines the criticism of the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Scriptures by Moh. E. Hasim on the practice of the sea alms tradition in the context of the purification of the faith of the Sundanese people. The tradition of sea alms is an expression of local culture that has been firmly rooted and inherited from generation to generation, but in practice it often contains symbolic elements that have the potential to contradict the principles of monotheism. This research aims to analyze the views of Lenyepaneun's interpretation of the tradition and its implications for strengthening the Islamic faith of the Sundanese people. The research method used is qualitative-descriptive with a library research approach, through the analysis of Lenyepaneun tafsir texts, Qur'anic verses related to faith, and literature review about the tradition of sea alms. The results of the study show that the Lenyepaneun interpretation emphasizes the importance of purifying the faith through the affirmation of the value of monotheism and the rejection of ritual practices that contain elements of shirk, superstition, and superstition. However, this interpretation also opens up space for cultural approaches by reinterpreting traditions to be in harmony with Islamic values without eliminating local cultural identity. This study emphasizes that the purification of the faith does not always require the elimination of traditions, but can be done through a process of education, transformation of meaning, and wise da'wah in accordance with the socio-cultural context of the Sundanese people.

**Keywords:** Purification of faith, Interpretation of the Scriptures, The tradition of sea alms, the Sundanese Society, The Local Wisdom of Islam.

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## INTRODUCTION

The tradition of sea alms is one of the cultural heritages that has been ingrained in the lives of coastal communities of the archipelago, especially in West Java. In Pangandaran, this tradition is better known as the sea wish, which is an annual ritual that is carried out as an expression of gratitude for the sustenance of the sea as well as a request for safety for fishermen. Although outwardly this tradition has social and cultural value, at the theological level it holds serious problems related to the purity of faith, because the procession often involves the



prohibition of offerings to the sea which some of the perpetrators understand as offerings to spirits or rulers of the sea (Koentjaraningrat, 1994).

The main problem behind this study is the tension between the pure Islamic faith and local cultural practices that are still thick with elements of pre-Islamic beliefs. The belief in Nyi Roro Kidul as the ruler of the southern sea, for example, has become a part of local cosmology that is difficult to separate from the daily practices of the coastal Sundanese people. The practice of offerings offered to the sea is often understood by the community as a form of transcendent communication with supernatural forces other than Allah, so that it has the potential to plunge the perpetrator into the practice of shirk (Supriyadi, 2012). This is contrary to the principle of monotheism as affirmed in Q.S. Al-Ikhlāṣ/112:1-4 that Allah is the only God worthy of worship, there is nothing equal to Him.

It is in this context that the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Verse by Mohammad Emon Hasim (Moh. E. Hasim) becomes very relevant to be studied. This Sundanese commentary written between 1989 and 1993 is a monumental work that not only serves as an explanation of the content of the Qur'an, but also as an instrument of refinement of the faith directed specifically at the Sundanese people. Using the tahlili method with the pattern of adab al-ijtimā'ī, Hasim seeks to present the message of monotheism in the language and nuances of Sundanese culture, so that the message is easier to accept and penetrate into the consciousness of the local community (Rohmana, 2013).

The phenomenon of syncretism in the religious diversity of Sundanese society has long historical roots. Before Islam came into existence, the Sundanese Wiwitan beliefs had formed a complex cosmological system, in which nature was believed to be inhabited by spiritual forces. When Islam was present in the Sundanese Tatars since the 15th century, the process of Islamization took place gradually and accommodatingly, giving birth to a distinctive religious pattern: Islam that grew side by side with local traditions. Kahmad (2005) noted that this pattern gave birth to two poles in West Java society, namely traditionalist groups that maintain traditional rituals such as nadran, sea alms, and seren taun, and modernist groups that view the practice as superstitious, superstitious, and even shirk.

The study of the local interpretation of the archipelago, including Sundanese interpretation, is still very limited in the Indonesian academic treasure. Previous studies have focused more on Javanese or Malay interpretations. Although Rohmana (2014) and Evarial (2017) have made important contributions on the interpretation of Moh. E. Hasim, a critical study that specifically uses the interpretation of Lenyepaneun as an instrument to criticize the tradition of sea alms with the aim of purifying the faith has never been carried out comprehensively. This emptiness is the main reason for this research to be conducted.

This study formulates three main questions: first, how Moh. E. Hasim explained the concept of purification of faith in the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Holy Text? Second, what interpretation method does he use in conveying the message of monotheism to the Sundanese people? Third, how relevant is the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Scriptures in guiding the faith and facing contemporary religious challenges in Sundanese society? The answers to these three questions are expected to fill the academic gap as well as provide practical guidance for contextual da'wah efforts in Sundanese society.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with the library research method. The selection of this method is based on the nature of the object of study in the form of text, namely the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Holy Text, as well as the study of literature related to the tradition of sea alms and Islamic faith. According to Praswoto (2011), literature research is a series of activities related to the method of collecting library data, reading, recording, and processing research materials sourced from various written references.

The primary data source in this study is the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Scriptures by Moh. E. Hasim which consists of 30 volumes, published by Pustaka (Bandung, 1989-1993). The analysis focused on verses related to monotheism, shirk, the prohibition of worship other than Allah, and the contextualization of local traditions. Secondary data sources include classical and contemporary tafsir works such as Tafsir al-Azhar (Hamka), Tafsir al-Mishbah (M. Quraish Shihab), Tafsir al-Maraghi, as well as scientific literature related to the tradition of sea alms, Sundanese culture, and Islamic studies of the archipelago.

Data collection is carried out through three main techniques. First, the analysis of documents on the text of Lenyepaneun tafsir to identify Hasim's views on shirk, superstition, and superstition in the context of local traditions. Second, a comparative analysis between Hasim's interpretation and other mufassir to see the uniqueness and relevance of his approach. Third, an ethnographic study of literature that describes the practice of Pangandaran sea wishes as an object of critical study.

Data analysis uses a content analysis approach combined with an interpretive anthropology approach in the style of Clifford Geertz. This approach allows researchers to not only identify the content and structure of the interpretive text, but also interpret how the text interacts with the social and cultural reality of the Sundanese people. The analytical framework used includes three dimensions: the theological dimension (the study of monotheism and shirk), the hermeneutical dimension (methods and patterns of interpretation), and the socio-cultural dimension (the relevance of interpretation to the contemporary Sundanese cultural context).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Tradition of Sea Alms (Hajat Laut) Pangandaran: Between Culture and Faith**

The Pangandaran sea wish is an annual ritual of the fishing community in Pangandaran Regency, West Java, which is carried out as a form of gratitude for the abundant sustenance of the sea as well as a prayer for safety for fishermen (Heriyawati et al., 2020). This tradition is believed to have existed for hundreds of years, rooted in the belief in animism and dynamism that believe that the sea is inhabited by supernatural beings. After Islam spread in West Java, this practice underwent acculturation: Islamic prayers were included in the procession, although the sacrificial element was still maintained (Nuraini et al., 2023).

The series of sea wish activities consisted of several processions. It begins with the kemitan dongdang, which is the preparation and care of offerings in the form of produce arranged on dongdang (stretcher) with traditional musical accompaniment. Then it was continued with the dongdang carnival, a procession of dongdang processions from the cultural

building to the west coast of Pangandaran, accompanied by dogdog musical instruments and panca drums, as well as the presence of a figure who played Dewi Nyi Roro Kidul as a symbol of the ruler of the sea. The core procession is larung dongdang, which is to ban dongdang containing offerings into the middle of the sea by riding a boat, which is accompanied by tasyakuran in the form of tawasul and joint prayer. The series was closed with cucurak, which is eating together as a symbol of unity and communal friendship (Fadilah, 2025).

From an anthropological perspective, Clifford Geertz (1960) called traditions such as sea wishes a form of syncretic ritual, in which old traditions are combined with new religious values. Geertz observed that in Javanese and Sundanese societies, religious values were absorbed without completely erasing old traditions. Victor Turner added that this ritual creates a *communitas*, which is a sense of brotherhood that strengthens social bonds among members of the community. Meanwhile, from Durkheim's perspective, the sea spirit strengthens the mechanical solidarity in which society is united because of collective tradition.

The theological polemic against the sea is centered on several elements that are seen as problematic from the point of view of Islamic faith. First, the presence of the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul in the procession and the necessity of the character's cast to participate in the ban, which reflects the belief that the sea goddess actively "accepts" the offerings. Second, the prohibition of offerings to the sea, which is understood by some people not only as a cultural symbol, but as a real offering to the supernatural power of the sea. Third, the belief that the big waves that appeared during the prohibition were a sign that the sea goddess accepted the offering. For Islamic scholars and mass organizations, these elements are considered to resemble worship other than Allah, thus falling into the category of *shirk* (Zubaidah, 2019).

### **Interpretation of Lenyepaneun Scriptures: Profile, Methods, and Characteristics**

Mohammad Emon Hasim was born in Ciamis on August 15, 1916 and is known as a self-taught Sundanese teacher, mufassir, writer, and cultural figure. He has a mastery of multilingualism including Sundanese, Indonesian, Arabic, English, Dutch, and Japanese. Although he did not have a formal Islamic boarding school education background, his high scientific spirit led him to the mastery of adequate Islamic sciences. He was active in the Muhammadiyah organization as the head of the branch in Cicendo, Bandung, and received an award from Sastra Rancage on January 31, 2001 in the category of Sundanese works for his work on the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Holy Verse (Rohmana, 2020).

The motivation for the preparation of this tafsir was born from two main concerns. First, Hasim's love for the Sundanese language, which is increasingly eroding, encourages him to produce a work of tafsir in Sundanese so that the Qur'an can be contemplated (contemplated) by the Sundanese people in their own mother tongue. Second, dissatisfaction with the translation and interpretation of the Qur'an that is circulating, which according to him is not able to enrich the reader's reasoning at the proper level (Hasim, 2006). This commentary was written starting in 1986 and completed in 30 volumes in 1989-1993, each volume containing one juz of the Qur'an with an average of 200-400 pages, published by Pustaka Bandung.

Methodologically, the interpretation of the Lenyepaneun Holy Verse uses the tahlili method with the approach of tafsir bi al-ra'yi in the style of adab al-ijtimā'i (community literature). The tahlili method means that interpretation is carried out sequentially following the order of the verses in the mushaf, by explaining each word, expression, and meaning of the verse in detail. The pattern of adab al-ijtimā'i means that interpretation is oriented to answer the social problems of the community, by presenting the message of the Qur'an in a language that is easy for the general public to understand. Hasim integrates illustrations of social and cultural events that are relevant to the context of Sundanese society, so that his interpretation feels actual and popular in his time (Juanda & Satria Khresna, 2017).

The peculiarities of Lenyepaneun interpretation lie in three main aspects. First, the use of the Sundanese language fluently (everyday) that is communicative, so that it can be reached by all levels of Sundanese society. Second, the content of the daily narrative of the Sundanese people is used as an illustration to explain the meaning of the verse, so that the sacred text feels close to the reality of the reader's life. Third, an active response to the social and religious discourse of the Sundanese people at the time, including issues of syncretism, superstition, bid'ah, and mystical practices (Rohmana, 2014). These three characteristics make Lenyepaneun tafsir a valuable interpretive document, as well as a tool for contextual social transformation.

### **The Concept of Purification of Faith in the Interpretation of Lenyepaneun Scriptures**

Moh. E. Hasim in the Lenyepaneun tafsir formulates the concept of purification of faith which is based on the absolute affirmation that Allah is the only God who has the right to be worshipped, there is no ally for Him, and He alone controls all sustenance and salvation of man. This concept refers to Q.S. Al-Ikhlāṣ/112:1-4 as the core of faith, as well as Q.S. Al-Nisā'/4:48 which affirms that shirk is the only sin that Allah will not forgive if the perpetrator dies without repentance. According to Hasim, shirk is not only limited to overt idolatry, but also includes any belief that other beings have the power to determine sustenance, salvation, or disaster (Hasim, 1989).

Hasim divides shirk into two broad categories. First, shirk jalī (real), which is a visible form of shirk such as idol worship, giving offerings to sea spirits with the belief that the spirit can protect from harm, or believing in the existence of Nyi Roro Kidul as a figure who actively determines the safety of fishermen. Second, shirk khafī (hidden), which is a subtle and not easily identifiable form of shirk, such as riya (showing off) in worship, doing deeds not for the sake of Allah alone, or excessive fear of social pressure if you do not follow traditional rituals. Hasim emphasized that both are violations of monotheism that must be avoided (Hasim, 1989, Volume 2).

In the framework of his criticism of the tradition of sea alms, Hasim refers consistently to several key verses. Q.S. Al-An'ām/6:137 is quoted to illustrate how the practice of sacrifice in the name of beings other than Allah is a tangible form of shirk. Q.S. Luqmān/31:13 is used as a moral warning that associating with Allah is a great tyranny, not just a theological error. Q.S. Al-Zumar/39:65 is used to affirm that shirk will abort all acts of worship. In addition,

Q.S. Al-Nāḥl/16:36 is a foothold to show that the mission of every apostle is to call people to worship only Allah and stay away from thāghūt (Al-Fauzan, 2014).

What is interesting about Hasim's approach is that the purification of the faith he carries out is not frontal and destructive to local culture. He did not directly call on the community to abolish the tradition of sea alms, but rather encouraged a reorientation of the meaning and intention behind the tradition. Gratitude and prayer should be entirely directed to Allah, not to other supernatural forces. Tradition can be maintained as a cultural expression as long as its ritual meaning does not lead to the recognition of a power other than Allah (Hasim, 1989, Volume 1). This approach is in line with what Nurcholish Madjid (2008) calls "Islamization from within", which is the process of cultural transformation towards Islamic values that is carried out organically from within society itself.

### **Criticism of Lenyepaneun's Tafsir on the Elements of Shirk in Sea Alms**

Lenyepaneun's interpretation provides a sharp but constructive criticism of the elements of shirk contained in the practice of sea alms. Hasim identified at least three problematic elements. First, trust in Nyi Roro Kidul as a figure who can "receive" offerings and provide salvation. In Hasim's view, this is a form of shirk jalī that directly equates the power of beings with the power of Allah. Second, the prohibition of offerings with the intention of offering to the spirit or ruler of the sea, which is an act similar to the sacrifice to other than Allah which is criticized in Q.S. Al-An'ām/6:137. Third, the belief that large waves are a positive response from the goddess of the sea, which reflects a belief in communication with supernatural beings outside the Islamic monotheistic system.

In criticizing this practice, Hasim uses not only theological arguments, but also social and rational arguments. He points out that the practice of shirk has negative effects that go beyond the spiritual aspect: it plunges society into irrational fear, wastes resources on rituals that have no basis, and weakens people's confidence and independence in facing life because they feel dependent on forces outside themselves and outside of Allah (Fazlur Rahman, 1980). With this comprehensive argument, Hasim seeks to touch people's consciousness not only at the level of faith, but also at the level of rationality and social welfare.

Hasim's view of shirk in the context of local traditions has a common point with a number of major mufassir. Hamka in Tafsir al-Azhar emphasizes that gratitude to Allah must be manifested in a tangible form, not just an empty symbol; According to him, it is more noble to feed the poor than to drown a buffalo's head into the sea. M. Quraish Shihab in Tafsir al-Mishbah added that cultural symbols may exist, but their meaning must be directed to the value of monotheism and the benefit of the ummah (Shihab, 2002). Hasim himself offered a concrete solution: replacing the elements of offerings with social-religious activities such as the distribution of food to the poor, the grand recitation, or the compensation of orphans, which are theologically much more meaningful and in accordance with Q.S. Al-Mā'ūn/107:1-3.

### **Da'wah Strategy and Tradition Reorientation in the Perspective of Lenyepaneun**

One of the most original contributions of Lenyepaneun's interpretation is the offer of a comprehensive da'wah strategy to purify the faith without damaging the local cultural identity.

Hasim summarizes the approach that can be summarized in five main strategies. First, the reorientation of meaning: the tradition of sea alms needs to be completely reinterpreted as an expression of gratitude to Allah alone, not to other supernatural forces. True intentions are the key to the purification of faith, as affirmed in Q.S. Al-Baqarah/2:21 that man is commanded to worship only Allah who has created him.

Second, symbol substitution: ritual elements that have shirk connotations are replaced with Islamic symbols. The offering to Nyi Roro Kidul can be substituted with written prayers or the distribution of tumpeng rice accompanied by the recitation of salawat. Third, continuous theological education: Hasim emphasizes that the purification of the faith is not enough to be done once, but must be a continuous educational process, as Allah commands in Q.S. Al-'Alaq/96:1-5 that reading and learning are the first obligations of a Muslim (Hasim, 1989, Volume 30).

Fourth, cultural and theological dialogue: Hasim refers to Q.S. Ash-Shurā/42:38 as the basis that all social changes, including the transformation of traditions, should be carried out through deliberation. This idea is in line with the concept of "privatization of Islam" developed by Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who emphasizes that Islam should not be present as a force that negates local culture, but rather gives the spirit of monotheism in it (Wahid, 2006). Fifth, socio-religious transformation: the tradition of sea alms can be transformed into a place of sharing and social concern that reflects the core of Islamic teachings on caring for others, as affirmed in Q.S. Al-Mā'ūn/107:1-3.

Empirically, this kind of traditional transformation strategy has proven to be successful in various regions. On the north coast of Java, people have replaced the offering larung with the distribution of rice tumpeng and joint prayers. In Madura, the tradition of the buffalo head is replaced with goats which are then cooked and eaten together after thanksgiving. In Bengkulu, the Tabot tradition, which was once full of animistic symbols, is now filled with recitations, Islamic cultural processions, and food alms for the poor. These changes not only saved the tradition from accusations of shirk, but also enriched its social meaning (Isnaeni, 2023; Arlindayanti, 2023).

### **The Relevance of Lenyepaneun Tafsir in the Contemporary Religious Context**

The message of purification of the faith put forward by the Lenyepaneun interpretation remains actual in the face of contemporary religious phenomena. In the era of globalization, Sundanese society faces two paradoxical challenges: on the one hand, the currents of modernization and cosmopolitanism erode local cultural identity; On the other hand, there was a religious revival that sometimes had a puritan face and tended to reject all local traditions. Lenyepaneun Tafsir offers a smart middle way: maintaining cultural values while purifying the faith from elements that are contrary to monotheism (Candra, 2020).

The relevance of this interpretation is also seen in the context of the preservation of the Sundanese language. In the midst of the dominance of the Indonesian language and the entry of global culture, Lenyepaneun's interpretation proves that the Sundanese language is able to become a medium for serious and in-depth Islamic studies. This is in line with the spirit of Sundanese scholars and cultural scholars who see that the preservation of the Sundanese

language and the strengthening of the Islamic faith can run synergism. The identity of "Islam teh Sunda, Sunda teh Islam" embedded in Sundanese society is confirmed precisely through the work of interpretation that uses their own mother tongue (Rohmana, 2017).

From the perspective of da'wah, Hasim's contextual approach provides valuable lessons for dai and religious leaders. The success of religious messages to be accepted by the public is not solely determined by the truth of the content of the message, but also by the relevance of the packaging and the way it is delivered. Hasim proved that using the mother tongue of the community, respecting local wisdom, and building an empathetic dialogue with local traditions is a much more effective da'wah strategy than frontal confrontation. This principle is in line with the concept of da'wah bil-hikmah wal-mau'izhah al-hasanah taught in Q.S. An-Nahl/16:125, namely preaching with wisdom, good advice, and debating in the best way.

This study also found that the *Lenyepaneun tafsir* has great potential as a reference in the development of a contextual Islamic religious education curriculum for the Sundanese people. The use of the Sundanese language and the local socio-cultural context in this interpretation can help students understand the Qur'an not as a book that is far from the reality of their lives, but as a guide to life that is close and relevant to their daily experiences as Muslim Sundanese. This is a tangible manifestation of the principle that the Qur'an is *shāliḥ li kulli zamān wa makān*, relevant to every age and place.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded three key findings that are interrelated. First, the interpretation of the Scriptures by Moh. E. Hasim formulated a comprehensive concept of purification of faith, based on the absolute affirmation of monotheism as enshrined in Q.S. Al-Ikhlāṣ/112:1-4 and Q.S. Al-Nisā'/4:48. Hasim identified that the tradition of sea alms contains elements of *shirk jalī* in the practice of prohibiting offerings intended as offerings to the supernatural powers of the sea, as well as *shirk khafī* in the form of social fear that encourages ritual involvement without theological awareness. However, the purification of the faith that he carries out does not require the elimination of traditions, but rather the reorientation of meaning and intention so that all ritual activities are in harmony with monotheism, placing Allah as the only place to depend and worship.

Second, the interpretation method used by Moh. E. Hasim is a *tahlili* method with a *bi al-ra'yi* approach with the *adab al-ijtimā'i*, which allows him to present the message of monotheism in simple and contextual Sundanese. The peculiarity of his approach lies in its ability to integrate the narrative of the daily life of the Sundanese people as an illustration of the explanation of the verses, so that the message of the Qur'an feels alive and relevant to the reader. Hasim not only serves as a *mufassir* who explains the text, but also as an agent of social transformation that guides people out of religious practices mixed with myths towards a pure understanding of Islam.

Third, the interpretation of the *Lenyepaneun* Scriptures remains relevant in guiding the faith of the Sundanese people in the midst of contemporary challenges. The message of purification of the faith that he puts forward is actual in the face of the ongoing phenomenon of syncretism, the current of modernization that erodes Islamic identity, and the challenges of

globalization that give rise to the problem of religious identity. With a da'wah approach that prioritizes cultural dialogue, respect for local wisdom, and the gradual transformation of the meaning of tradition, *Lenyepaneun tafsir* provides a model that can be used as a foothold for contextual da'wah efforts in Sundanese society and the Muslim community of the archipelago in general.

The practical implications of this study include: Muslim communities who still carry out the tradition of sea alms need to purify their ritual intentions as a form of gratitude to Allah alone; religious leaders need to develop a da'wah strategy that is persuasive and respectful of local cultural values; academics need to continue to develop the study of the local interpretation of the archipelago as part of Indonesia's rich Islamic treasures; and the government and cultural institutions need to encourage the preservation of traditions through a cultural reinterpretation approach that does not contradict the principles of monotheism. Thus, the balance between the preservation of cultural traditions and the purification of the faith can be realized in harmony.

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