

Preservation of Local Culture and Natural Conservation as Cultural Heritage in Kuta Traditional Village

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine how local culture is preserved and natural conservation, a cultural heritage of the ancestors, is implemented in the Kuta Traditional Village, Ciamis Regency. This research used a qualitative approach, with data collection techniques through field studies and literature review. The results indicate that the rapid development of science and technology has had a significant impact on community life, across social, economic, and cultural aspects. These changes often lead to shifts in values, norms, and lifestyles, leading to modernization. However, some communities remain steadfast in upholding traditional values, such as the Kuta Traditional Village community. The Kuta Traditional Community considers ancestral culture an inseparable foundation of daily life. They respect nature and their ancestors by upholding the customary order and rules that have been passed down through generations. One concrete form of this cultural preservation is the implementation of *pamali* culture, namely customary prohibitions that function as social controls and as a form of respect for nature and spiritual powers. Taboo values govern human relations with the environment, such as prohibitions against indiscriminately cutting down trees, not littering sacred places, and maintaining the sanctity of certain sites. This concept of the relationship between God, humans, and nature, maintained through local culture and beliefs, creates a harmony that is fascinating to study. The cultural and environmental preservation practices of the Kuta Traditional Village community are a concrete example of local wisdom practices that are able to respond to the challenges of the times without losing their cultural identity.

Keywords: Cultural Preservation, Nature Conservation, Local Wisdom, Kuta Traditional Village.

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization is an inevitable phenomenon that cannot be rejected or contained. It is characterized by the rapid advancement of technology and information, commonly referred to as the digital era, in which the world appears increasingly interconnected. Distances seem shorter, and tasks that were once difficult have become easier. In addition, globalization has transformed people's ways of thinking from traditional to modern perspectives. Although globalization offers many positive impacts, it also presents negative consequences, particularly the declining awareness of preserving local culture. Many people, especially the younger generation, tend to prefer foreign cultures because they are perceived as being more compatible with contemporary developments.

Kuta Traditional Village is one of the areas in Ciamis Regency that continues to preserve its local culture and traditions. It is located in Karangpaningal Village, Tambaksari District, Ciamis Regency, West Java Province. To this day, the indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village remains strongly committed to preserving the cultural heritage inherited from their ancestors. The community continues to uphold the *pamali* culture (taboos), which serves as a guiding principle for maintaining environmental balance and preserving social order.

Pamali refers to prohibitions or taboos that must not be violated by members of the community. It is believed that violating these taboos will bring misfortune or disaster. *Pamali* functions as an ancestral mandate that guides people in distinguishing between actions that are acceptable and those that are prohibited.

The ancestral mandates that continue to be preserved include:

1. Houses must be built on stilts with roofs made of thatch or palm fiber rather than permanent roofing materials, and the walls must be constructed from bamboo and wood.
2. Houses must have a rectangular shape consisting of two main rooms.
3. Members of the Kuta indigenous community are prohibited from digging the ground, either for constructing wells or for burying the deceased. Consequently, community members who pass away must be buried outside Kuta Traditional Village.
4. Sacred areas, including the sacred forest (*Leuweung Gede*), may only be entered on Mondays and Fridays. Community members are prohibited from taking or utilizing any natural resources from these protected areas.
5. Wearing entirely black clothing is prohibited.

At present, the younger generation's interest in preserving local culture and traditions has gradually declined because they often perceive these traditions as outdated, unattractive, or even strange. This situation has become one of the factors contributing to the gradual disappearance of local cultural values. Consequently, an important question arises: are there still communities that consistently uphold and preserve their local culture?

Some indigenous communities continue to maintain their ancestral heritage despite the challenges posed by globalization. They believe that the customs, traditions, and cultural practices inherited from their ancestors represent local wisdom that must be preserved and sustained despite various obstacles encountered in social life [1]. Challenges such as the limited availability of traditional building materials and the need for adequate infrastructure to access Kuta Traditional Village must be addressed to ensure the sustainability of its cultural heritage.

Based on the background described above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How is local culture preserved among the indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village in Ciamis Regency?
2. How is nature conservation implemented by the indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village in Ciamis Regency?

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the preservation of local culture within the indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village in Ciamis Regency.
2. To analyze the implementation of nature conservation practices carried out by the indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village in Ciamis Regency.

Customs, traditions, or habitual practices constitute a system of values inherited from ancestors that regulates the social life of a community across generations [2]. The preservation of local culture represents one form of local wisdom or indigenous knowledge that reflects the cultural values maintained by a particular community [3]. At present, both cultural preservation and environmental conservation are increasingly threatened by the rapid pace of modernization and globalization. Therefore, this research is important as a contribution to the preservation of local culture and the maintenance of ecological balance in Kuta Traditional Village. Furthermore, this study supports the flagship program of Universitas Galuh in promoting cultural preservation and environmental conservation.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena occurring within society, including cultural practices, traditions, and human behavior, in a comprehensive and in-depth manner. Qualitative research methods are designed to explore the behavior and perceptions of participants concerning a particular topic [4]. This study focused on data collection through observation, interviews, documentation studies, and literature review.

The research was conducted through the following stages:

1. Identifying issues related to the preservation of local culture and the implementation of nature conservation in Kuta Traditional Village, Ciamis Regency.
2. Collecting research data through observation, interviews, documentation studies, and literature reviews relevant to the research objectives.
3. Analyzing the collected data through the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia is a country rich in customs, cultures, and traditions that continue to be preserved by its people. With thousands of islands stretching from Sabang to Merauke, many regions still maintain the customs and traditions inherited from their ancestors. One of these regions is Kuta Traditional Village in Ciamis Regency. Kuta Traditional Village is recognized as a cultural tourism village in Ciamis Regency based on Ciamis Regency Regulation Number 15 of 2016 concerning the Recognition and Protection of the Kuta Village Indigenous Community.

Kuta Village is referred to as a traditional village because its people continue to uphold the customs, traditions, and cultural values inherited from their ancestors, while maintaining a unique social and belief system that distinguishes them from other communities. Several characteristics support this designation. The majority of the community depends on agriculture as their primary livelihood, while maintaining a strong customary belief system reflected in traditional ceremonies such as *nyuguh* (offering prayers), *babarit* (traditional thanksgiving ritual), and *tilawat* (religious recitation). In addition, customary regulations governing community behavior and procedures for entering sacred areas constitute an important aspect of local culture. Other customary prohibitions (*pamali*) are also strictly observed, including the requirement that deceased community members be buried outside Kuta Traditional Village and the prohibition against constructing permanent houses [5,6].

Kuta Traditional Village is located within Karangpaningal Village, Tambaksari District, approximately 45 km from the capital of Ciamis Regency. Administratively, it consists of two neighborhood associations (*Rukun Warga*—RW) and four neighborhood units (*Rukun Tetangga*—RT). The village borders Cibodas Hamlet to the north, Margamulya Hamlet to the west, and the Cijolang River to the south and east, which also serves as the provincial boundary between West Java and Central Java. Kuta Traditional Village remains one of the indigenous settlements that has successfully preserved its traditional way of life in Ciamis Regency. The community continues to uphold local cultural values by adhering to customary taboos (*pamali*), which function to maintain environmental balance and preserve social harmony [7].

Nature conservation represents an integral part of the indigenous community's way of life. The community protects the sacred forest while preserving natural springs and sugar palm trees, which constitute essential sources of livelihood. Their respect for the forest is reflected in customary rules governing access to the sacred area, including the prohibition against wearing footwear and the prohibition against taking any plants, animals, or other natural resources from the forest [8].

The findings of this study regarding the preservation of local culture and the implementation of nature conservation in Kuta Traditional Village are presented in the following sections.

Preservation of the Local Culture of the Indigenous Community of Kuta Village

Origins of Kuta Village

In the Sundanese language, the word *kuta* means a wall or fortress. The name "Kuta" originates from the geographical condition of the village, which is situated in a steep valley approximately 75 meters deep and surrounded by high cliffs. This natural landscape resembles a fortress that protects the settlement, giving rise to the name *Kuta* [9].

Several versions explain the origin of Kuta Traditional Village. One version states that the name "Kuta" is derived from the word *Mahkuta* (crown), which symbolizes rank or honor. According to the traditional elders (*sesepuh*) of Kuta Village, many individuals achieved high social status after living in the village or at least after visiting and making pilgrimages to the sacred graves located in the area.

Another account explains that Kuta Traditional Village was originally planned to become the center of the Galuh Kingdom during the reign of King Permadikusuma. However, because the location was considered strategically unsuitable and the available land was insufficient, the plan was abandoned and the kingdom was eventually established elsewhere. Nevertheless, the indigenous people of Kuta believe that several tools and materials prepared for the establishment of the Galuh Kingdom are still preserved within the village.

Another historical account identifies Aki Bumi as the founder of Kuta Village. He traveled to the area, which had previously failed to become the capital of the Galuh Kingdom on the banks of the Cijolang River. Aki Bumi was sent by the King of Cirebon to spread Islam to the southern region. He later became the first *kuncen* (traditional custodian) responsible for safeguarding the sacred places in Kuta. He was regarded as a person of exemplary character, whose conduct became a moral guideline for the community. After his death, Aki Bumi was buried outside Kuta Village. Out of respect for him, the indigenous community has since maintained the tradition of burying deceased community members outside the village.

Culture and Customs of the Kuta Village Community

Kuta Traditional Village is one of the unique indigenous villages in Ciamis Regency and has been designated as a historical and cultural tourism destination. The traditional ceremonies and performing arts practiced by the community represent valuable cultural heritage that must be preserved. In the era of globalization, many local traditions have gradually declined; therefore, preserving these cultural practices has become increasingly important.

The traditional rituals and ceremonies performed by the indigenous community of Kuta Village include the following:

Nyuguh

The *Nyuguh* tradition is an inseparable part of the cultural life of Kuta Traditional Village. Every year, on the 25th day of the month of Safar, the community performs this ritual as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty. The ceremony symbolizes thanksgiving for a successful harvest and the well-being enjoyed by the community. The *Nyuguh* celebration involves all members of the village and reaches its peak with a procession carrying a palanquin filled with agricultural products, followed by a communal prayer expressing gratitude for the blessings that have been received.

Earth Alms (*Sedekah Bumi*)

The *Sedekah Bumi* (Earth Alms) ceremony is performed by slaughtering livestock and burying part of the offering in a designated location. Afterwards, the community gathers to share a communal meal while sitting directly on the ground, without using chairs or mats. This tradition holds profound significance for the indigenous people of Kuta. Besides strengthening social solidarity, it serves as an expression of gratitude to God and as a ritual intended to ward off misfortune. The ceremony is commonly accompanied by traditional performances such as *gondang buhun*, *terbang*, and *rengkong*.

Babarit

The *Babarit* ceremony in Kuta Village, Ciamis Regency, is a traditional ritual conducted to honor ancestors, pray for safety, and express gratitude for God's blessings. The ceremony is generally performed following natural disasters, such as earthquakes, prolonged droughts, or other natural phenomena. The *Babarit* ritual includes a series of traditional activities, including the preparation of offerings, communal prayers, and traditional dances. Several sacred mantras are recited during the ceremony, including *Tumbal Jagat*, *Karahayuan*, *Pamunah*, and *Palumpuhan*.

Rules of the Kuta Traditional Village Community

The indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village has a set of customary rules that must be obeyed by all community members. The people of Kuta continue to strongly uphold their traditions and cultural values, particularly the concept of *pamali* (taboo). *Pamali* refers to prohibitions that must not be violated by members of the community. It functions as an ancestral guideline that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, as well as between actions that are permitted and those that are forbidden. The observance of *pamali* is believed to ensure safety and harmony in both worldly life and the hereafter.

The customary prohibitions observed by the indigenous community of Kuta Village include the following:

1. **Prohibition against constructing permanent houses with brick walls and tiled roofs.**

Houses in Kuta Traditional Village must be built using natural materials. The structures are traditionally constructed from wood and bamboo, with roofs made of palm fiber or thatch. Because the land in Kuta Village is relatively unstable and vulnerable to landslides or earthquakes, houses are built on stilts and arranged in an orderly pattern. This traditional stilt-house architecture is considered more resistant to earthquakes and better adapted to local environmental conditions.

2. **Houses must have a rectangular shape, and it is taboo for houses to be built back-to-back unless they are located far apart.**

The relatively uniform architectural design reflects the community's social values, emphasizing equality among residents so that no household is perceived as wealthier or poorer than others. In addition, houses are generally built facing one another to encourage social interaction and strengthen relationships among community members.

3. **Restrictions concerning the *Leuweung Karamat* (Sacred Forest).**

Community members who enter the sacred forest are prohibited from wearing official clothing, jewelry, or footwear, and they are also forbidden to urinate within the forest area. The sacred forest is a highly protected customary area where no plants, animals, or other natural resources may be taken or utilized. The *pamali* tradition plays an essential role in ensuring the protection and conservation of the forest. It is believed that anyone who violates these customary rules will receive immediate consequences according to the law of nature or karmic justice.

4. **Prohibition against burying the deceased within Kuta Traditional Village.**

The indigenous community is prohibited from digging the ground, either for constructing wells or for burying the dead, because the land of Kuta is regarded as sacred. Consequently, no public cemetery exists within the village. Community members who pass away are buried in another location outside Kuta Traditional Village, following the ancestral customs that continue to be observed today.

Cultural Attractions and Traditional Arts

In addition to its traditional rituals, customary rules, and cultural prohibitions, Kuta Traditional Village possesses a variety of distinctive traditional arts that form an important part of its cultural heritage. These artistic traditions continue to be preserved and performed by the indigenous community.

The traditional arts of Kuta Village include the following:

Gondang Buhun

Gondang Buhun is a traditional percussion performance (*tutunggulan*). The performance is carried out exclusively by women, who play the wooden mortar (*gondang*) while simultaneously serving as vocal performers. The musical instruments consist of a wooden pestle (*halu* in Sundanese), approximately two meters long, and a mortar measuring about 2.5 meters in length. The mortar is filled with bundles of harvested rice, which are rhythmically struck to produce distinctive musical sounds.

This tradition is performed to honor Nyi Dewi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri (Dewi Sri), the Goddess of Rice, and serves as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty for a successful harvest.

Terbang

Terbang is a traditional musical performance that developed from Islamic spiritual traditions. It is commonly performed during *ruwatan* (house purification ceremonies) and childbirth celebrations. Historically, this performance was also known as *nyolawat* or *nyolawatan* because the songs consisted primarily of prayers and praises expressing gratitude to God Almighty.

The term *terbang* has several interpretations. One interpretation derives it from the Sundanese concept of *ngapung* (to fly), symbolizing the spiritual journey of human beings toward their Creator. Another interpretation associates the name with the musical instrument used in the performance, namely the *terbang*, a frame drum similar to a tambourine.

Tayub

Tayub originates from two words: *mataya*, meaning dance, and *guyub*, meaning harmony or togetherness. The dances performed in *Tayub* are commonly referred to as *ibing*. Generally, *Tayub* is recognized as a traditional performing art characterized by dance movements accompanied by gamelan music. The performances may be presented individually, in pairs, or in groups.

Rengkong

Rengkong is a traditional art closely associated with the agrarian culture of the Kuta community. It employs a traditional bamboo instrument known as the *renkong*. This cultural performance forms part of the rice harvest tradition, during which harvested rice is collectively transported from the fields to the house or rice barn.

The performance involves rhythmic body movements while carrying the bamboo instrument. As it is carried, the *renkong* produces a distinctive sound that resembles the croaking of frogs, creating a unique musical accompaniment during the harvest procession.

Forest Conservation as a Form of Nature Conservation in Kuta Traditional Village

Conservation is an effort to protect and manage natural resources wisely with the objective of preventing environmental degradation and ensuring the sustainability of nature [10]. Within the indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village, nature conservation is an inseparable part of the cultural heritage inherited from their ancestors and reflects the community's respect for the natural environment. One of the most tangible manifestations of this conservation ethic is the existence of the *Leuweung Karamat* (Sacred Forest), a protected forest regarded as sacred and strictly prohibited from exploitation. The indigenous people of Kuta deliberately refrain from utilizing the natural resources within this area because they believe that preserving nature is essential for maintaining environmental balance and human survival. The community adheres to the philosophy that as humans preserve nature, nature will in turn sustain human life. Consequently, the natural environment in Kuta Traditional Village remains well preserved and ecologically balanced.

The Sacred Forest also functions as an important source of knowledge, serving as a buffer zone and a source of life for the surrounding community. The people believe that if the forest is damaged, the village itself will eventually be destroyed. Likewise, any violation of customary values governing behavior toward nature is believed to bring misfortune or disaster upon the community.

The Sacred Forest of Kuta Village, locally known as *Leuweung Gede*, is located to the south of Kuta Traditional Village and covers an area of approximately 40 hectares. This protected forest is carefully safeguarded by the indigenous community through a number of customary regulations that must be obeyed by everyone who visits the area. These customary rules include the following:

- 1. It is prohibited to take anything from the forest.**

This prohibition aims to prevent environmental degradation and ensure the sustainability of the forest ecosystem. As a result, the large trees within *Leuweung Gede* continue to grow naturally and remain well preserved.

- 2. The forest may only be visited on Mondays and Fridays.**

This restriction represents part of the local wisdom and customary traditions firmly upheld by the indigenous community. Mondays and Fridays are considered the most appropriate days for interacting with nature and with the spiritual guardians believed to protect the sacred forest.

- 3. Visitors are prohibited from wearing footwear, jewelry, or official attire while entering the forest.**

Entering the sacred forest barefoot symbolizes respect for nature and adherence to the beliefs of the indigenous community. This practice reflects the traditional view that nature is sacred and must be protected. Walking barefoot also symbolizes humility and simplicity when interacting with nature. In addition to its spiritual significance, this practice helps minimize damage to the forest ecosystem and contributes to maintaining environmental cleanliness.

- 4. The use of jewelry, particularly gold, is prohibited within the sacred forest.**

The indigenous community believes that individuals entering the forest while wearing official uniforms or gold jewelry will experience a decline in social status or authority. This customary regulation reflects the community's belief that the sacred forest possesses strong spiritual power that must be respected.

- 5. Digging the ground for any purpose is prohibited.**

The people of Kuta Traditional Village consider their customary land to be sacred; therefore, digging the ground, including for burial or other purposes, is prohibited. In addition, the unstable soil conditions

constitute a practical reason for this prohibition, as excavation could damage the natural landscape and increase the risk of land degradation.

6. Houses must be constructed using natural materials.

Residential houses in Kuta Traditional Village are traditionally built from wood, bamboo, and palm fiber in accordance with customary philosophy and environmental conservation principles. These natural materials are considered environmentally friendly because they can naturally decompose and return to the ecosystem after their useful life. Furthermore, the stilt-house construction system reduces humidity, minimizes termite damage, and provides greater resistance to earthquakes.

7. The community preserves sugar palm (*Arenga pinnata*) trees.

The indigenous people of Kuta Traditional Village maintain and protect sugar palm trees because they possess significant economic, social, and cultural value. Sugar palm trees provide the primary raw material for producing palm sugar, which constitutes an important source of livelihood for the local community. In addition, the fibers of the sugar palm are widely used as roofing materials for traditional houses. Ecologically, sugar palm trees contribute to maintaining environmental balance by reducing soil erosion, improving water retention, and supporting the sustainability of the local ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Kuta Traditional Village represents a unique cultural tourism destination in Ciamis Regency that continues to preserve the customs and traditions inherited from its ancestors. These cultural values constitute an important form of local wisdom that must be maintained to prevent them from being eroded by the rapid development of modernization and globalization.

The strong adherence of the indigenous community to the *pamali* (taboo) tradition reflects an ancestral legacy that regulates human behavior and attitudes toward nature, ensuring environmental sustainability and social harmony. The harmonious relationship between humans and nature practiced by the Kuta Traditional Village community remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary environmental challenges. Nevertheless, some members of the younger generation perceive these traditions as outdated and no longer relevant. Therefore, preserving customs, traditions, and local culture is a shared responsibility. These traditions represent the cultural identity of the community, strengthen social cohesion, and serve as a bridge for understanding the history and noble values inherited from previous generations. Furthermore, preserving local traditions provides an opportunity to transmit indigenous cultural values to future generations, thereby ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the community's cultural heritage.

Declarations

The authors declare that this research received no external funding and that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study. All authors contributed substantially to the research and approved the final version of the manuscript. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants prior to data collection. The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The authors sincerely express their gratitude to the indigenous community of Kuta Traditional Village and Universitas Galuh for their support and cooperation throughout the research process.

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