

June 2023

## "Bale desa"; Preservation of cultural values and women's leadership in Tengger, East Java, Indonesia

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### Recommended Citation

Sukmawan, Sony; Firdaus, Elvin Nuril; and Setyowati, Lestari (2023) ""Bale desa"; Preservation of cultural values and women's leadership in Tengger, East Java, Indonesia," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*: Vol. 24: No. 2, Article 6.

DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v24i2.1218

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana/vol24/iss2/6>

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## *Bale desa*

### **Preservation of cultural values and women's leadership in Tengger, East Java, Indonesia**

SONY SUKMAWAN, ELVIN NURIL FIRDAUS,  
AND LESTARI SETYOWATI

#### ABSTRACT

Indonesian *bale desa* (village halls) are traditionally seen as public service centres for rural communities. For the people living in Tengger, East Java, Indonesia, village halls play a dual role as public service centres and venues where villagers observe and preserve age-old customs in which women's leadership is of paramount importance. This study aims to identify the local values related to women's hard work and adroitness in maintaining the continuity of customs and tradition, and analyse the way Tengger women exercise their leadership in village halls and the contributions they make to the preservation of local culture. This research uses a field research design, which relies on the participant observational data collection in the villages in Tosari Subdistrict, Pasuruan Regency, East Java. The outcomes of the study show that the *bale desa* is a functional and vital customary instrument in the preservation of tradition thanks to women's leadership and managerial roles. The important position of women in the *bale desa's* public space has guaranteed the preservation of local values which are deeply rooted in the spirit of cooperation, hard work, and solidarity.

#### KEYWORDS

Tengger women, *bale desa*, *pawon*, local values, leadership.

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SONY SUKMAWAN ET AL. | DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v24i2.1218.

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

*Bale desa* (village halls) traditionally serve as rural local government centres and service points for the villagers. The village hall generally functions as a workspace from which government officials manage and deal with people's requirements (Rofii 2019). For the people of Tengger, village halls serve not only as centres of rural administration, but they also play the role of the place where locals gather, manage, and preserve their customs. In the area of Tengger, Pasuruan Regency, village halls are divided into two main sections, namely the conventional village administrative office and the village hall as a community gathering space in which locals preserve and observe their ancestral customs.

Public service jobs in the village administrative office are generally performed by men because of their jobs as village officials. However, the village hall also serves as a gathering space for women in which they can perform their customary duties of preparing for and performing ceremonies or rituals plus all the social activities required when those ceremonies have been completed. The role of women in preserving customs in the village hall is enormous – they responsible for preparing food, making the required offerings, and ensuring the rituals run successfully. The village hall, which is known locally as the *bale desa*, is a place in which they organize and prepare for festivities and rituals. Various rituals, especially important rites performed for personal and communal purposes, are staged in the *bale desa*.

The presence of Tenggerese women is predominant when customs and traditions are observed in *bale desa*. This fact resonates with Rahmi Febriani's (2018) observation that Tenggerese women have duties which are equal to those of men, and that they also act as the guardians of local tradition. Devotees of Hinduism, which most Tenggerese are, hold the belief that women are highly respected members of the community (Ni Nyoman Rahmawati 2016). Religion portrays women as goddesses who maintain the cosmic balance and protect the traditions. Therefore, the Tenggerese people regard women are men's equal counterparts.

Women take full control and authority in managing and performing rites and celebrations on the premises of the *bale desa*. The domestic work undertaken by Tenggerese women is anything but trivial; what they do in the *bala desa* is instrumental to the survival of the local custom and tradition. Their dedication demonstrates Tenggerese women's devotion to their motherland.

Tenggerese women assume an active role in maintaining the stability of their local customs in both family and community (Sony Sukmawan and Rahmi Febriani 2018). Additionally, Darmin Tuwu (2018) explains that women not only play a role in the domestic sector; they are also the driving force which generates the family income. Many studies reveal that women are the pillars of life in the economic, social, and cultural realms (Ikhwan Setiawan 2008; Yayuk Yuliati 2011; Sukmawan and Febriani 2018; Maria Novita Sitanggang

<sup>1</sup> This research is fully supported by the Indonesian Directorate of Research and Community Engagement (DRPM) of Higher Education for funding in 2022.

2018; Teva Delani Rahman 2021; Asmi Ramiyati et al. 2022). Unfortunately, previous studies have not discussed the traditional role of Tenggerese women in the space of the *bale desa* as a cultural artefact, which can potentially reveal this fascinating fact about Tenggerese women. Therefore, this study aims to: (i) identify the local values related to women's hard work and vital role in ensuring the continuity of customs and traditions and (ii) analyse Tenggerese women's leadership in the *bale desa* and their contribution to the preservation of local culture.

This study took place in the villages of Mororejo, Ngadiwono, and Telogosari (Tosari Sub-district, Pasuruan Regency, East Java). The research used an interdisciplinary approach, involving cultural, gender, and folkloristic perspectives. The researchers used participant observation in the data collection phase. The researchers also used the cultural method to analyse culturally important practices. Besides these, the gender perspective was used to discern women's leadership in customs and tradition analysis. Finally, a folkloristic approach was applied to analyse the *bale desa* and the activities surrounding it as a folklore phenomenon.

The interdisciplinary approach was selected because this study aims to uncover the spiritual and material aspects of the *bale desa* and Tenggerese women revealed through their behaviour, ways of thinking, and social interaction. These data were collected through direct observation of Tenggerese women's daily activities and in unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews were chosen to enable the researchers to gain rich, in-depth data.

The data in this study are speeches, opinions, oral expressions, gestures, and the personal conduct of Tenggerese women in the traditional environment and in the *bale desa* in context of the transmission of local values and women's leadership. The *dukun pandita* (the shamans) and their wives from Mororejo, Telogosari, and Ngadiwono Village, and Tengger women, served as the data sources. The decision to choose them was based on pragmatic considerations related to customary leadership and women's experiences in observing the traditions. The steps in data analysis process, which include data gathering, data display, data reduction, and conclusion, are based on M.A. Miles and M.B. Huberman's (1994) model. Collected data are presented in the form of description, images, and interview transcriptions. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, the researchers used the triangulation method by using data source confirmation/member checking technique and theoretical crosschecking technique.

#### *BALE DESA*: INSTRUMENT OF VALUE TRANSMISSION AND GUARDIAN OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The people of Tengger perform various rituals throughout the year, for both personal and communal reasons. Dina Fitria Hasanah and Sony Sukmawan (2020) recorded a number of rituals, ranging from monthly, annual, and quinquennial rituals, as well as various rituals which were performed privately. Examples of monthly rituals are *Barikan*, which is performed on a monthly

basis, and *Pujan*, which is carried out once every four months. The rituals celebrated once a year are the *Yadnya Kasada* and *Karo*. These ceremonies constitute the most important events in the Tenggerese traditional calendar. In addition to this, the people of Tengger also have a ritual, which is carried out every five years: the *Unan-unan*. Besides these public rituals, personal or private rituals are performed to mark people's births, important events in their lives, and deaths. The rituals in question are birth ceremonies, *Among-among*, *Tugel kuncung*, *Walagara*, death rituals, *Entas-entas*, and many others. Most of those rituals are held at the *bale desa*.

The *bale desa* is chosen as the place for traditional ceremonies because the rituals usually involve many participants as people who sponsor the ceremonies usually invite their relatives. Those invited for *bethek-sinoman*, for example, can reach hundreds to thousands of people. Therefore, the village hall is chosen because usually there is not enough space at home.<sup>2</sup>

Many rituals in Tengger are carried out in the Mount Bromo area, both in the *bale desa* and at home. The ritual held on Mount Bromo itself is a huge event involving Tenggerese people originating from the surrounding districts: Malang, Pasuruan, Lumajang, and Probolinggo. The rituals carried out in the *bale desa* are usually dedicated to serving both communal and private purposes. Private rituals are generally carried out in the village hall because people do not have enough space at home to accommodate the participants. Such rituals are usually called *Walagara* and *Entas-entas*, in which the hosts invite hundreds to thousands of *bethek-sinoman* (caretakers and people attending the celebration) (Sony Sukmawan 2020; Rubi Supriyanto 2021). In addition to these traditional purposes, the *bale desa* is also used for formal meetings of the village officials.

The *bale desa* is physically divided into workspaces dedicated to the preparation and performance of rituals and festivities. These rooms have their specific ritual functions. The diversity of rich, ornate ceremonies and rituals is one of the prime reasons people have expanded the basic function of the *bale desa*. For instance, among Balinese people, who are also predominantly Hindu, the traditional Bali Aga/Bali Mula house functions not only as a place in which to live and for family gatherings but also as a place in which religious and traditional rituals take place (Tri Anggraini Prajnowrdhi 2018).

The spatial structure of the *bale desa* resembles that of Javanese *joglo* houses which are built on a rectangular or square floor-plan. Maria Damiana Nestri Kiswari (2019) reveals that the most typical characteristic of this traditional Javanese house is in the shape of the roof in the form of a *pencu*, whose central, highest section is supported on four very high pillars. A Javanese *joglo* is characterized by the *pendhapa* (area for the reception of guests and staging various performances), *pringgitan* (porch), *dalem* (inner sanctum), kitchen, *gandhok* (special chamber for grown-up children), and *gadri* (dining-room).

<sup>2</sup> Interview with RE (*dukun pandita* from Telogosari), 22-5-2022.

The *bale desa* is constructed and arranged following the general pattern of traditional Javanese houses. As the Tenggerese people are part of the wider Javanese society, the way they arrange the rooms in their *bale desa* is not much different from the typical Javanese *joglo* house. The rooms in the *bale desa* are called *petamon*, *bujana*, *pawon* (kitchen), *penyimpan* (storage) (Figure 1), *gedong pedaringan*, *pekiwan*, *penampun* (container), and *pekayon*.



Figure 1. Rooms in *bale desa*: a. *Petamon*, b. *Bujana*, c. Kitchen (*pawon*), d. *Penyimpan* room.

The *petamon* or meeting room is used to receive guests and organize rituals. The *petamon* is quite spacious; it measures about 200 metres square, forming a generous space filled with a stage, tables, and chairs. The stage located at the front is usually used to lead rituals, as the bridal room for wedding ceremonies, and artistic performances. In the prelude to a ceremony, the *petamon* is used to receive guests. This is similar to the function of the *pendhapa* in a *joglo* house which serves as a reception room for meetings and for staging performances (Christian Moniaga and Alvina Gunawan 2019). However, the Javanese *pendhapa* is an open space, whereas the *petamon* in the front part of the building is enclosed by four walls. When guests enter the *bale desa*, they will be greeted by ushers standing ready near the door. The function of receiving guests is carried out directly by the chief *sinoman*.

In the *petamon*, men and women work side by side. Men prepare the tables, chairs, and banners (when necessary), while the women are responsible for preparing meals for the guests. When preparations for the celebration are under way, the people who are invited as *bethek-sinoman* will come to the village hall to assist the host: they provide free labour and sometimes supply the money or materials needed for the ceremonies. The women who are invited

as *bethek* can either help in the kitchen or mingle in the *petamon* with the hosts. For the local people, *petamon* symbolizes kinship and harmony.

The sense of kinship and harmony which emanates from the communal gathering in the *petamon* epitomizes the chief purpose of Javanese *Anjangsana*, which is to keep people in touch with one another. Their interaction is cordial and courteous. Tenggerese people are renowned for their pleasant demeanour and steadfast adherence to tradition. In *bethek-sinoman* tradition, the values of courtesy, community, togetherness, familiarity, and warmth are clearly evident (Zulya Rachma Bahar and Sony Sukmawan (2021).

The *bujana* is the name for a dining-room. Another term for a dining-room in the *bale desa* is *prasadana*. In the *bujana*, guests are free to serve themselves from a traditional buffet. Tables and chairs are provided in the *bujana* for guests. This large dining-room is not a compulsory part of *bale desa*. The Javanese and the Balinese call a traditional kitchen as well as hearth, a *pawon*, which means a kitchen with multiple stoves (Prajnawrdhi 2018). There are several ways to construct a *pawon*: heaps of wood chips, movable brick to make a hearth, and a more modern stove made of concrete. Javanese people believe cooking using a *pawon* fuelled with charcoal produces more delicious dishes. However, since the introduction of more modern stoves, people no longer cook on a *pawon*. A *pawon* is prone to make the bottoms of pans and other kitchen utensils to turn sooty black because of their exposure to a wood fire; another reason the *pawon* is now becoming less popular. In a typical Tenggerese household, a *pawon* is a special room at the back of the house, specially dedicated to cooking (Teva Delani Rahman, Murni Rachmawati, and Sarah Cahyadi 2021).

Nevertheless, a *pawon* is still used for cooking in the *bale desa*. This traditional stove is now permanently constructed in concrete to spare people the trouble of stacking bricks or stones to make a make-shift hearth. The kitchen in the village hall is divided into several rooms, namely (i) *pawon adang* (special stove for cooking rice); (ii) *kela janggan* (stove and *pawon* for making stews and soups); (iii) side dishes (stove and *pawon*); (iv) beverages kitchen (stove and *pawon*); (v) pastry kitchen (stove and *pawon*); and (vi) *isuh-isuh* (a scullery, a special section for dishwashing). In addition to using a *pawon* for cooking, Tenggerese people have now begun to use gas stoves. Nowadays, a *pawon* is usually used for cooking in large portions, requiring large frying pans and rice-steamers.

The next room is called the *penyimpan*, which is used to store food and ritual ingredients. The food stored in this pantry is dry foodstuff like rice-noodles and the components of other side dishes. These will be taken to the village *bale* before the celebration begins, particularly during the ritual called *Boyongan*, usually held one week before the main ceremony.

The *penyimpan* room has wide shelves on which locals store the materials needed for the celebration. Besides this, in several village halls, such as that in Tosari village, people store mattresses and pillows in the corner of *penyimpan*. This bedding is reserved for the *bethek sinoman* who spend their nights in the *bale desa*. The *penyimpan* is different to the storage rooms in Balinese traditional houses, which are usually considered sacred places. It is the place in which

the equipment and necessities for offerings are kept (Prajnawrdhi 2018). The storage room is also located in the village hall adjacent to the kitchen giving cooks easy access.

*Gedong pedaringan* is a term for the wet cooking ingredients storeroom, like freshly slaughtered beef and other wet ingredients for side dishes. The *gedong pedaringan* is usually located near the *pawon* and *pekiwan*.

The *pekiwan* literally means toilet, which is located directly behind the *bale desa*, usually near the kitchen. The village *bale* in Tosari village has two *pekiwan* located near the kitchen and *gedong pedaringan*. In contrast, the *pekiwan* in Ngadiwono village hall is located at the rear adjacent to *pekayon* (firewood store). The *pekiwan* in the *bale desa* itself has a similar layout to a *joglo* house. Fitria Nur Kholisa (2021) explains that *pekiwan* or *pakiwan* should be built at some distance from the 'clean spaces' such as bedrooms and living-rooms. This explains why they are located right at the back, usually near the *pawon*.

The *penampung* is not a mandatory part of *bale desa*. It is literally an additional storehouse. Usually, *penampung* will be built on to the *bale desa* if the main pantry proves too small.

These rooms in the *bale desa* are the spaces in which women play the dominant roles. In these rooms, women work hard and efficiently. Working hard means that women put in a lot of effort, support one another, and perform their tasks with patience and dedication. This is evident on the occasions when many women acting as *bethek* are present in the *bale desa*. They help their relatives and neighbours voluntarily. Rudi Hartono (2021) states categorically that the importance of women's domestic responsibilities cannot be understated. Through their domestic work, women are also given leadership training, particularly in the areas of household management, cooking, and assisting other women in developing their professional skills. Tenggerese women have exhibited the spirit and value of leadership in the practice of traditions in the framework of the customs of the *bale desa*.

Besides working hard, Tenggerese women also work deftly. They can organize a division of tasks which allows the work in the *bale desa* to run effectively amidst the busy preparations of festivities. The division of labour is also based on each person's individual abilities. A skilled, experienced *bethek* is usually handpicked by the host to handle the job of preparing the main course, the side-dishes, and make pastries. The duties of the other *bethek* are divided proportionally: steaming the rice on the traditional stoves (*adang*), preparing beverages, and doing the washing-up. These women complete their tasks in the *bale desa* with stunning efficiency and real sense of responsibility. Generally, work in the *bale desa* begins at seven in the morning, though it might begin sooner when needed. According to Fitriani (2015), nowadays leadership in the public sphere is more concerned with each person's ability and performance than it is with their gender. The distribution of women's work in *bale desa* according to their skills is undeniably what defines the success of the celebration.

The *bethek* and the observance of custom and tradition in the *bale desa* is an example of semi-oral folklore (J. Danandjaja 1984; Endraswara 2010), which serves as a vehicle for embedding a consciousness and the passing down of

values like accountability, compassion, community, and cooperation, and more prosaically the use of indigenous food knowledge. As this custom is being observed, *Mbok Dukun Pandita*, *Mbok Legen*, and *Mbok Sepuh* are teaching mothers both young and experienced how to store, preserve, and process food, through imitation and example. As emerging customs and interactions among related individuals are demonstrated frequently and repetitively, specific ceremonial offerings are a form of indigenous knowledge (R. Ellen and H. Harris 2005). These values and knowledge not only contribute directly to the smooth implementation of custom and tradition, but also have a significant impact on the preservation of the local culture. In addition, the institution of the *bale desa* has become a traditional instrument which embodies, stores, and activates the process of transmitting indigenous values and knowledge.

#### WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE *BALE DESA* AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TENGGERESE TRADITION

Historical chronicles are rife with narrations about oppressed women (Mursidah 2012). Women are considered powerless and subordinate to men (Imam Syafe'i 2015). Javanese women used to suffer a social stigma which relegated them to secondary figures. This stigma did not weaken Javanese women; instead, it made them resilient and independent. Javanese women's domestic work and status shaped them into *wani ing tata* individuals. Wasisto Raharjo Jati (2015) states that the idiom *wani ing tata* means that Javanese women are heroic figures and capable of organizing themselves. Tengger women, as part of Javanese society, have had Javanese philosophical values instilled into their personalities and implement them in their daily lives.

Sukmawan and Febriani (2018) reveal that the characters and traits of Tenggerese women have been inherited from the figure of *Roro Anteng*, their mythical ancestress. The belief system of the Tenggerese people helps them enormously in exploring and improving their abilities. Tenggerese women relish and take pride in their voluntary activities at or away from home.

Tenggerese women usually get up early to begin work. Among their daily chores are cooking, making drinks, and cleaning the house. If they are planning to take care of the farmland, they will first cook their daily meal, and then they go to the fields and return home at 2 p.m. After that, they will bathe and then cook the evening meal.<sup>3</sup>

For the people of Tengger, the concept of *kasur*, *pupur*, and *sumur*, once so firmly associated with Javanese women, no longer applies. Nevertheless, domestic work remains an inherent part of Tenggerese women's lives, and they acknowledge their obligation to carry it out. Rizky Pudjianto (2017) mentions that domestic work does not necessarily make women second-class citizens, but rather that it is an essential part of domestic life in this region. Tenggerese women voluntarily wake up early to prepare breakfast and lunch for the

<sup>3</sup> Interview with BD (wife of the *dukun pandita* from Ngadiwono Village), 12-6-2022.

fields. Not only do they prepare supplies for their husbands and children who go to school, they also work in the fields. Jobs such as planting, tending, and harvesting corn, cabbage, and potato crops are done with pleasure as one of their responsibilities. Their daily work continues until 2 p.m. After returning home, the women tackle their domestic work, cleaning the house, and cooking the dinner. They project the image of a faithful, hard-working, and self-reliant women.

Tenggerese women's strong connection to domestic tasks is what associates them closely with the term *bethek*. Ayu Sutarto (2008) describes two terms that Tenggerese people use to refer to relatives and neighbours who help in a celebration. *Bethek* or *biodo* refer to "women who help in a celebration", while men are called *sinoman*. *Bethek* and *sinoman* both work in the *bale desa*. For *bethek*, the main workspace is in the kitchen (Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Bethek* activities in the *pawon lauk-pauk*.

The *bethek-sinoman* tradition has been passed down orally for generations in Tengger. This tradition teaches Tenggerese people about the importance of mutual assistance, which is still honoured by the local community. In addition to helping each other, the tradition of *bethek-sinoman* also gives Tenggerese people the opportunity to build friendships and strengthen ties. Before preparations commence, the host of the celebration will visit the homes of the people who will be invited to be *bethek-sinoman*. This takes place months before the actual celebration. Bahar and Sukmawan (2021) reveal that *bethek-sinoman* applies to all the Tengger people, not only to those who follow Hinduism. Tenggerese people view religious differences as an opportunity for the community to increase communal harmony. Religious difference does not necessarily spark hostility among the people of Tengger. The presence of traditional support helps people to accept each other's differences. Therefore, Tengger has what is called *desakalapatra* (Holifatul Hasanah and Sony Sukmawan 2021), meaning each village has different customs.

For the women, working in the *bale desa* is like doing usual household chores, such as cooking rice, vegetables, side-dishes, cakes, and drinks at home. As *bethek* they are involved with many people. The host of the party will distribute the jobs to the *bethek*.<sup>4</sup>

Being a *bethek* represents Tenggerese women's domestic work outside the household environment. The activities involved in being a *bethek* are like those of other (Javanese) women when they are asked to help at celebrations, such as working in the kitchen of the *bale desa*. Women will *adang sego* (cook rice) in the *pawon*, make *kela janggan* (vegetable soup), cook side-dishes, and make cakes and drinks. Most of these activities are carried out in *pawon*. Other *bethek* do cook using gas-stoves if large numbers of guests are invited. Tenggerese women who help cook in the kitchen will work in tandem to serve dishes fit for the guests.

The number of *bethek* who help at the celebration will work in their allotted spaces. The *bethek* who are tasked with making beverages will prepare and deliver drinks to guests and *sinoman*. The same applies to other *bethek* who make cakes and other foods. These activities are carried out voluntarily, commencing a week before the event and continuing until it finishes.

When the *bethek-sinoman* come to *bale desa* to help the host of the celebration, they do not come empty-handed. In general, they will bring the basic necessities (rice, sugar, cooking oil), money, and cigarettes. A *peniti* writes down the commodities given. The note made by the *peniti* is needed so that after the event is over, the host will bring these *bethek-sinoman ater-ater* in the form of staples or other foodstuffs.<sup>5</sup>

As stated by Bahar and Sukmawan (2021), besides lending their physical assistance, it is common for Tenggerese people to give material help. This material assistance is in the form of groceries, cash, or cigarettes. The assistance is not only given to the invited *bethek*, but also to the *bethek-sinoman*. The host will also "return" the gift in the form of food and staples to the *bethek-sinoman* as a token of gratitude for helping prepare the celebration. This will be done by a *peniti* or the person in charge of recording the guests' gifts. Based on the notes made by a *peniti*, later, the guests will have food or other goods brought to their houses as an expression of gratitude. This tradition carries on the teachings of the ancient Javanese people who encouraged people to help each other in celebrations.

Tenggerese women are happy to become *bethek* and help in the success of a celebration or party. It is common for the host to invite many people to be *bethek-sinoman*. Sometimes, a ceremony is "overstaffed" by an excess of hundreds or thousands of *bethek-sinoman*. These people have no specific jobs or roles in the rituals, but they may remain at the *bale desa*, especially because they bring material assistance for the host with them. Tenggerese women believe that being invited to become a *bethek-sinoman* constitutes a moral

<sup>4</sup> Interview with BR (wife of the *dukun pandita* from Mororejo Village), 12-6-2022.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with RE (wife of the *dukun pandita* from Telogosari Village), 21-6-2022.

obligation to help prepare the celebration. These rules are not written down, but are obeyed by the Tenggerese people because they feel obligated to carry out the teachings of their ancestors, which is to help each other.

In the *bale desa*, Tengger women are generally tasked with preparing food, drinks, and making offerings or carrying out rituals. As shown in Figure 2, one of the activities carried out by *bethek* is preparing side-dishes in the traditional kitchen or *pawon*. In the *pawon*, *bethek* not only cook these side-dishes, but also organize, prepare, and serve them. In the picture above, *bethek* is arranging the *cenggareng* (*serundeng*). *Cenggareng* is one of the longer-lasting dishes made from grated coconut and spices.

Based on observations made in Tengger *bale desa*, there are two divisions of labour for women, namely (i) a *bethek* who runs the preparation of food and drinks for celebrations and (ii) *Mbok Sepuh*, *Mbok Legen*, and *Mbok Dukun* who are in charge of preparing the offerings days before the celebration begins. Some *bethek* even work a week before the event commences. *Mbok Dukun*, *Mbok Sepuh*, and *Mbok Legen*, who make the offerings, also help the *bethek* prepare the food. They converse and mingle while assisting the other *bethek* to finish their work. The wives of the shaman occasionally offer criticism, suggestions, and praise for the *bethek*'s work. This is an attempt by the customary leadership to provide support and evaluate the performance of *bethek*.

The spirit of togetherness shown through the division of tasks and mutual assistance among Tenggerese people in the *bale desa* proves that it is a place with a definite function. It symbolizes the order, harmony, and balance achieved by the Tenggerese people, both women and men, in maintaining their cultural values. This kind of order and harmony is largely determined by the proper functioning of the traditional leadership of the women in preserving the Tengger tradition.

In the *bale desa*, the women who work as *bethek* follow a division of labour which regulates their work in the *pawon*, for instance, in the *pawon adang*, *kela janggan*, side-dishes, cakes, beverages, and *isuh-isuh*. These divisions of labour are very closely linked to the vital role of women in the domestic sphere. However, the *bale desa* is not only a workspace for women, as men also take an active role as *sinoman* at the same venue. The role of *sinoman* is to undertake the heavy work, such as slaughtering cattle, transporting goods, arranging tables and chairs, and setting up *tarup* (large tents for shelter).

The *sinoman* group is led by a leader who is called the *sinoman* chief, but the *bethek* do not have a formal leader. The division of labour of the *bethek* is directly distributed by the host of the party.<sup>6</sup>

The task of distributing and coordinating the jobs of the *sinoman* is left to the chief of the *sinoman* who is appointed directly by the host of the party. In contrast, the wife of the host is the person responsible for distributing the tasks to the groups of *bethek* working in the *pawon*. Generally, each *pawon*

<sup>6</sup> Interview with RE, 12-6-2022.

used for cooking is staffed by a contingent of approximately fifty women. The preparations for a celebration, which begin one week before, are carried out by the Tenggerese women working on a voluntary basis. This kind of task division and the responsibility of fulfilling the task is a form of regulating leadership. Dian Cahyani and Arin Maftuhah (2018) have shown that the dominance of women's work in the domestic environment (*pawon*) is not a reason for disgruntlement and complaint. Instead, its presence strengthens the sense of kinship through the chats which occur while cooking in the *pawon*.

Mutual assistance in the Tenggerese community is not limited to activities in the *bale desa* or during celebrations, it also features heavily in daily activities. The people of Tengger have another term for *bethek-sinoman*, namely *sayan*. *Sayan* is mutual assistance among the Tenggerese for building houses and agricultural activities (Joko Tri Haryanto 2014). Additionally, H. Hasanah and Sukmawan (2021) mention that the term *sayan* is also used for people who help prepare celebrations.

In Tengger, there is also the term *sayan* which is used for people who help in house building or farming activities.<sup>7</sup>

Like the activities carried out by the *bethek-sinoman*, in *sayan*, women work in the kitchen and men undertake the heavier work. Men participate in the process of building a house: mixing cement, laying bricks, and tiling. Meanwhile, women work in the kitchen, preparing food for male workers. Besides cooking, during *sayan* women will also participate in working in the fields to harvest a neighbour's crop. These activities show that Tenggerese women can explore their own potential through activities carried out at home, in the surrounding environment, and in the traditional environment. They show that Tenggerese women are hard workers. They uphold the spirit of unity, nobility, and harmony.

The next term which is important to the Tenggerese women is *srawung*. The intensity of the work performed by Tenggerese women at home, in the community, and on the premises of the *bale desa* during preparations for celebrations is almost overwhelming. Tenggerese women are depicted as hardworking people, loyal to customs, and sensitive to the community's social needs. This is why Pudjianto (2017) states that Tenggerese women practice the art of *srawung*. Practising the typical Javanese characteristic of tractability; they adapt to local customs and culture, being friendly and good at socializing.

Women's leadership is visible not just in the *bale desa* environment, but also in the Tenggerese tradition. More than eighteen rituals are carried out by Tenggerese people every year. These rituals range from communal needs to personal needs. Yulianti (2011) divides the rituals in Tengger into three types: community needs, rituals related to the life-cycle, and rituals related to agriculture. The rituals which are meant to be carried out in the public sphere are major events like *Hari Raya Karo*, *Pujan Kapat*, *Pujan Kapitu*, *Pujan Kawolu*,

<sup>7</sup> Interview with RE, 12-6-2022.

*Pujan Kasanga, Yadnya Kasada, and Unan-unan.* Rituals related to the life-cycle are held for births, marriages, and deaths, including the *Mitoni, Cuplek Puser, Among-among, Tugel kuncung, Walagara, and Entas-entas* rituals. Most of Tenggerese people have agricultural land or work as agricultural labourers, so vital farming activities also have a special ceremony: the *Leliwet* ceremony.

The many rituals the Tenggerese observe every year mark important moments for women. Without their participation, the rituals will not run smoothly. Women play a role in making and preparing a vital element in a ritual: the offerings. Sukmawan and Febriani (2018) reveal that offerings are a vital element in the ritual as they are presented to the ancestral spirits and act a means of communication to the ancestors in the ceremony. Therefore, the role of women in a ritual is vital because it determines the success of a ritual.

The offerings for each ritual generally use ingredients obtained from Tengger crops in the form of leaves, flowers, seeds, fruit, water, and fire.<sup>8</sup>

These materials will be selected, prepared, and served to the ancestors. The offerings which must be present in a ritual are *gedhang ayu, juadah, pepes* cake, *pasung* cake, and *tetelan* (Sukmawan and Febriani 2018). *Gedhang ayu* is a symbol of seating for ancestors. *Pepes* cakes are a symbol of the female sex and *pasung* cake of the male sex, and *tetelan* is a symbol of intimacy in the family. The *juadah* itself consists of three types: *juadah ireng*, which is a symbol of the forest, *juadah putih*, is a symbol of the Father of the Forest, and *juadah abang* is a symbol of the Mother of the Forest.

Another factor which stimulates the practice of arranging offerings made of natural materials is the fact that women have a special bond with nature because they share similar characteristics. The designations *Terra Mater* or *Mother Earth* or *Bumi Pertiwi* are symbolic terms which puts the earth in a position of loving and protecting everything in it (Vandana Shiva 1989). Hence, the Tenggerese women's customary obligation to arrange the offerings symbolizes their connection to nature. Importantly, offerings are ceremonial infrastructures which serve an ecological purposes, such as maintaining and preserving the balance between people and nature and ensuring the prosperity and safety of the village (*Mayu Desa, Mayu Bumi*), guarding the water sources (*barian*), the fields (*leliwet*), and the honouring of Tengger nature and the universe (*Karo, Pujan Kasanga, Nambak*).

Making and preparing offerings are regarded as an obligation by Tenggerese women, especially *Mbok Dukun* (wife of a *dukun pandita*), *Mbok Legen*, and *Mbok Sepuh*. These ranks of the wives of the customary leaders are tasked with guiding the preparations of the offerings at each ritual. *Mbok Legen* and *Mbok Sepuh* must memorize the spells and make offerings, while it is the task of *Mbok Dukun* to memorize the elements of offerings.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with RE, 22-5-2022.

The preparation of offerings is usually done by dividing the tasks. For example, *pasung* is made by *Mbok Dukun*, *juadah* is made by *Mbok Legen*, and *pepes* is made by *Mbok Sepuh*. This is done so that the offerings are completed quickly and efficiently.<sup>9</sup>

This division of tasks is a regulatory function of a leader (Charles Keating 1991). Sukmawan and Febriani (2018) have shown that the division of tasks make the preparations of offerings more effective. Even though there is a division of tasks, it does not mean that *Mbok Sepuh*, *Mbok Legen*, and *Mbok Dukun* work individually. The local community and relatives also help them prepare the offerings. This arrangement shows that Tenggerese women also contribute to maintaining the unity between communities.

In short, *bethek* in the *bale desa* environment is an activity of Tengger women in maintaining and preserving the togetherness between communities. In Javanese (in this case, Tengger) traditions, the presence of women is a symbol of social life. Pudjianto (2017) has argued that the life culture for women is in the social environment.

Based on observations in the *bale desa* of Ngadiwono village, many women who help with the celebrations (*bethek*) will gather in the kitchen to prepare food and offerings (see Figure 3). For instance, when preparations are made for the *Entas-entas* ritual this begins by inviting (*sesuruh*) the women and men to take part in the work as *bethek-sinoman*. Hosting the ceremony is a function of initiation in leadership (Keating 1991). As mentioned previously, the wife of the host of the celebration will provide the *bethek* with more detailed instructions on the work which needs to be done in the *bale desa*. Usually, female guests and *bethek* who have just arrived will choose to go straight to the kitchen, exchange news, and chat with the other *bethek*.



Figure 3. *Bethek* preparing the ritual of *Entas-entas*.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with BD, 12-6-2022.

Among the obligatory rituals for Tengger women are *Hari Raya Karo*, *Yadnya Kasada*, *Pujan*, *Barikan*, and the ritual on the night of *Friday Legi*. Sony Sukmawan, Maulfi Syaiful Rizal, and M. Andhy Nurmansyah (2018) have shown that these rituals are sacred events; menstruating women are not allowed to be present. This rule applies when the ritual is carried out at the temple. This situation shows how significant the presence of women in the rituals is. They prepare the vital elements of the ceremony and pass down the knowledge to the next generation.

In cultivating customs in general, Tenggerese women are tasked with channelling and educating their children with knowledge about Tengger and the traditional rituals which surround it. The concept of *titiluri*, honoured by the Tenggerese community, is one way of passing on traditional knowledge to children. It is scrupulously preserved by Tenggerese people to educate children about traditions, the daily running of the society, community activities, and work (D.F. Hasanah and Sukmawan 2020; Sukmawan 2020; Sony Sukmawan, Asri Kamila Ramadhani, and Elvin Nuril Firdaus 2020; Sony Sukmawan, M Andhi Nurmansyah, and Rahmi Febriani 2021). *Titiluti* is a concept of the preservation of customs seen in the relationship between humans and the Almighty. The implementation of ceremonies which range from monthly to annual, the use of Tenggerese traditional clothes, and obeying the rules for the Tengger people are some of the teachings enshrined in *titiluri*.

Tenggerese women will regularly teach their children by using the oral traditions and in their daily behaviour as parents. Subconsciously, children will emulate their parents. In the Javanese tradition, Tenggerese children inherit a deferential trait; they obey the customs and learn about Tengger. For example, the *Sodoran* dancers in the Karo ceremony are the children and teenagers who make up the majority in Tengger villages. Children volunteer to perform as dancers. They understand that their homeland has many cultures and traditions which should be preserved. Being a *Sodoran* dancer is a part of their conservation efforts.

Children register voluntarily as *Sodoran* dancers. Gradually, they are also taught about the meaning of the dance. [...] Tenggerese children are taught about their traditions through the *titiluri* and *pasraman* of Hinduism. The teaching is also carried out through the advice and direction of parents.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of *titiluri* is not only applied by parents at home, but is extended through a special education programme for Hindus at an educational institution called a *pasraman*. Like other religious educational institutions, a *pasraman* is a place at which school-age children share and strengthen traditional knowledge. Children will be educated about the religious teachings, customs, and etiquette which need to be obeyed in everyday life. Educational institutions play an important role in educating children and transmitting knowledge. Siti Khoiriyah and Wildatul Maghfiroh (2018) have stated that educational institutions such as *pasraman* are another forum which helps parents to teach knowledge about local wisdom and Tengger customs.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with BD, 12-6-2022.

D.F. Hasanah and Sukmawan (2020) have postulated that *titiluri* is an orally transmitted cultural conservation concept. The concept of *titiluri* shows the role of women in obeying customs and passing on Tenggerese cultural heritage to their children and grandchildren. Tenggerese women have formed a communal personality, making them pillars in the continuity and resilience of the local tradition.

## CONCLUSION

A *bale desa* is not just a physical space in which Tenggerese women prepare and observe their ancestral traditions. It also serves as a socio-cultural area in which these women place an emphasis on sensible traditional leadership and serve as the carriers of ecologically sound cultural values and knowledge. The activities which take place in *bale desa* and performed by the *bethek* are not just routine domestic activities such as cooking but are richly imbued with social values. In *bale desa*, *bethek* practice the tradition which serve as vehicles for sowing and passing down values to younger generations. Values like responsibility, compassion, togetherness, and cooperation, as well as indigenous knowledge are preserved during *bethek* activities in the *bale desa*.

Thanks to women's successful leadership and management roles, the *bale desa* is a traditional instrument essential to the survival of the tradition. The preservation of traditional values is ensured by the prominence of women in the public areas of the *bale desa*. Tenggerese women's leadership is crucial to passing down cultural knowledge and values about customary management. This leadership contributes to the conservation of Tenggerese culture.

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