

Community Perceptions of the Ruwatan Rambut Gimbal Tradition in the Dieng Highlands, Wonosobo Regency

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ABSTRACT

The tradition of ruwatan for children with naturally curly hair is a cultural heritage of the Dieng community that is still preserved as part of their belief system and local cultural identity. This tradition is associated with children who have naturally curly hair and are believed to be connected to the ancestors of Dieng. This study aims to analyze the community's interpretation of the "ruwatan rambut gimbal" tradition, their views on children with curly hair, the values embedded in the tradition, and the urgency of its preservation. The study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and literature review, and were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results indicate that the community interprets the "ruwatan rambut gimbal" as a cultural heritage passed down through generations and as a symbol of respect for their ancestors. This tradition embodies cultural, spiritual, and social values, as well as a sense of community and mutual cooperation, which strengthen social cohesion within the Dieng community. Furthermore, preserving this tradition is considered important not only for maintaining local cultural identity but also as a cultural asset that contributes to the development of tourism based on local wisdom. These findings confirm that the "ruwatan rambut gimbal" tradition serves cultural, social, and symbolic functions that remain relevant in the lives of the Dieng community amid the dynamics of social change.

Keywords: cultural identity, cultural preservation, local wisdom, the Dieng community, the "ruwatan rambut gimbal" ritual.

1. INTRODUCTION

Local culture is an important part of the identity of Indonesian society, passed down from generation to generation. Local traditions serve not only as cultural heritage but also as the community's beliefs, social values, norms, and worldview. Amid the rapid pace of globalization and modernization, the existence of local traditions is increasingly eroded, making it necessary to raise awareness about preserving them so that communities do not lose their cultural identity. Customary traditions also serve as a social glue that strengthens bonds among community members through shared activities and specific ritual events. Therefore, the preservation of local culture is a vital effort to uphold the meaning and values embedded within it. According to Susantoso (2021), local culture also acts as a source of traditional knowledge that shapes community identity and plays a crucial role in their social lives. Efforts to preserve culture are necessary to ensure that cultural values continue to be passed down to future generations amid social change and the progression of time (Arifah & Saputra, 2023). One local tradition that is still upheld today is the "ruwatan rambut gimbal" tradition, which has developed in the Dieng Highlands region of Wonosobo Regency, Central Java (Khasanah et al., 2021; Syarifuddin et al., 2022).

The Dieng Highlands are known as one of Central Java's cultural regions, home to various beliefs and traditional customs that are still preserved by its people. In addition to being recognized as a destination for natural and historical tourism, Dieng also features a social life that remains closely

intertwined with spiritual elements and ancestral cultural traditions. The people of Dieng believe that the relationship between humans and their ancestors must be maintained through various traditional rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation. In Dieng society, traditional customs are viewed as an essential part of cultural identity and a form of respect for ancestors. According to Hamsah (2020), the community's belief in spiritual matters is still quite evident in the various traditional ceremonies collectively performed by the local people. This situation indicates that local culture remains a vital component in shaping the community's identity and way of life (Serepinah & Nurhasanah, 2023).

One of the distinctive cultural phenomena in Dieng is the presence of children with naturally curly hair. This curly hair is believed to be closely linked to spiritual elements and the beliefs of the local community. As stated by Yulianto and Abidin (2016), children with naturally curly hair are considered special—that is, they are believed to have a specific connection to the ancestors of Dieng, particularly Kyai Kolodete, who is revered as the ancestor of the Dieng community. The community believes that this kinky hair cannot be cut carelessly, as it may bring misfortune if the cutting is not performed through a special ritual. Typically, before the hair is cut, the child with kinky hair will make a specific request that must be fulfilled by the family. This belief remains alive within the community and continues to be an integral part of the cultural identity of the Dieng people to this day (Khasanah et al., 2021).

Al Maida and Suryaman (2023) explain that in the ritual of cutting curly hair, the people of Dieng must go through several traditional stages. This tradition begins with the preparation of offerings, the fulfillment of the child's wish, a procession, a purification ceremony, the hair-cutting itself, and finally, the ritual offering of the cut hair as the concluding stage of the ritual. Each of these processes is an integral part of the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition, which is still preserved by the Dieng community to this day.

For the people of Dieng, the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition holds an important place in their social and cultural life. This tradition is not only viewed as an ancestral legacy passed down through generations but also as part of the Dieng community's identity. The continued existence of this tradition demonstrates that the community's cultural values and beliefs are still preserved to this day. Furthermore, the practice of this tradition, which involves the entire community, reflects a sense of solidarity through mutual cooperation and social concern in Dieng society. Therefore, the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition stands as a form of cultural heritage that remains of great significance to the people of Dieng (Sawaludin et al., 2023).

Several previous studies have examined the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition from various perspectives. Yulianto and Abidin (2016) discussed the process of performing the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” ritual and its purpose as an effort to remove “sukerta” from children with curly hair. Hamsah (2020) examined the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition using a *rites-of-passage* approach and found a connection between the traditional ritual and the development of cultural tourism in Dieng. Khasanah et al. (2021) studied the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition as part of the cultural identity of the Dieng community, which is preserved through the annual *Dieng Culture Festival*. The research by Al Maida and Suryaman (2023) focused more on the ritual symbols in the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition through a semiotic analysis. Hermawan (2022) explained that the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition is a form of cultural acculturation that has developed within the Dieng community. Additionally, Putri and Saefudin (2024) highlight the connection between the ruwatan ritual and the balance between humans and nature, while Salsabila et al. (2025) discuss the value of multiculturalism within the gimbal hair ruwatan tradition. Research by Putra et al. (2026) also indicates that the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition serves both as a means of cultural preservation and as a cultural tourism attraction in Dieng.

Furthermore, Laksono (2026) explains that traditional rituals in Javanese society contain symbolic meanings that function to preserve collective identity and social values.

Although various previous studies have examined the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition from the perspectives of ritual, cultural identity, semiotics, multiculturalism, and cultural tourism, research specifically focused on analyzing how the community interprets this tradition remains limited. Most previous studies have described the ritual stages or interpreted cultural symbols from the researchers’ perspective. However, understanding how the community interprets this tradition is a crucial aspect for determining why it continues to be preserved amid social change and the passage of time. Therefore, this study focuses on the Dieng community’s interpretation of the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition as part of their social and cultural life.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe the Dieng community’s interpretation of the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition and to uncover the cultural values that the community perceives within this tradition. In addition, this study also aims to understand the community’s views on the importance of the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition in the social and cultural life of the Dieng community. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to efforts to preserve local culture, serve as a source of information for the community, and enrich academic research on intangible cultural heritage and the importance of preserving regional cultural traditions amid the changing times.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. This method was chosen because it is suitable for understanding the community’s interpretation of the ruwatan rambut gimbal tradition based on the experiences and perspectives of the people of Dieng. Qualitative research is used to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon occurring within a community (Fadli, 2021).

The research data were obtained through interviews, observations, and a literature review. The research informants consisted of three residents of Dieng Kulon who were familiar with the ruwatan rambut gimbal tradition. The interviews were conducted in June 2026 at the informants’ respective homes. In addition, this study also utilized various written sources, such as journals, books, and documents related to the research topic. Fadli (2021) explains that the use of interviews, observations, and documents as data sources is one of the characteristics of qualitative research.

The data obtained were then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. These stages were carried out to organize and understand the data more systematically so as to provide a clear picture of the subject under study (Sidiq & Choiri, 2019). The analysis was conducted by grouping the data based on themes that emerged from the interviews and literature review, and then interpreting the data to understand the community’s perceptions of the ruwatan rambut gimbal tradition.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings were obtained through interviews with three informants from Dieng—Mr. Erwin, Ms. Erma Setiawati, and Mr. Ricky Setiawan—who are members of the community with an understanding of the ruwatan rambut gimbal tradition in Dieng. In addition to the interviews, this study was also supported by observations and relevant literature reviews. Based on the analysis of the data, several main themes emerged regarding the community’s interpretation of the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition, namely the community’s “ ” interpretation of the tradition, their views on children with “rambut gimbal,” the values embedded in the tradition, and the importance of preserving the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition.

The Community’s Interpretation of the “Ruwatan Rambut Gimbal” Tradition

Based on the interview results, the people of Dieng view the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition as a cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation by their ancestors. This tradition is not only regarded as a customary ritual but also as a form of cultural preservation that defines the identity of the Dieng community. According to Mr. Erwin, the “rambut gimbal” tradition is linked to the ancestral figures of Dieng, namely Kyai Kolodete and Nyai Ronce, who are believed to have had “rambut gimbal.” Therefore, children with “rambut gimbal” are considered part of a cultural heritage that must be respected and preserved (Interview with Mr. Erwin, June 15, 2026).

A similar view was expressed by Ms. Erma Setiawati, who stated that the tradition of ruwatan rambut gimbal is a cultural practice passed down through generations that is still upheld today as a form of cultural preservation among the people of Dieng (Interview with Ms. Erma Setiawati, June 13, 2026). Meanwhile, Mr. Ricky Setiawan views this tradition as a legacy from their ancestors that must continue to be preserved by the people of Dieng (Interview with Mr. Ricky Setiawan, June 13, 2026). These findings indicate that the community views the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition not only as a customary ritual but also as a cultural identity that distinguishes Dieng from other regions. These research findings align with the study by Khasanah et al. (2021), which states that the “rambut gimbal” tradition is one of the cultural identities of the Dieng community that is still maintained to this day.

Community Perceptions of Children with Gimbal Hair

The presence of children with gimbal hair has long been a part of life in the Dieng community. This phenomenon is not viewed as something strange but rather as part of the traditions and beliefs that have developed within the community. Nevertheless, there are diverse perspectives regarding the presence of children with gimbal hair within the community.

Most people view children with dreadlocks as having certain special qualities because they are associated with the beliefs that have taken root in the community. Mr. Erwin explained that the people of Dieng regard dreadlocks as a gift or legacy from their ancestors, so the presence of children with dreadlocks is accepted as a natural part of community life.

Ms. Erma Setiawati also noted that children with dreadlocks are often seen as different and more special than other children. According to her, children with dreadlocks tend to be more active than children in general. However, Mr. Ricky Setiawan noted that not all members of the community share the same level of belief regarding the phenomenon of dreadlocks. Some still believe in it, while others view it as part of a culture passed down through generations.

These findings indicate that despite differing perspectives, the community still accepts the presence of children with dreadlocks as part of the social and cultural life of the Dieng community. These results align with Hamsah’s (2020) research, which shows that the dreadlock purification ritual is inseparable from the beliefs of the Dieng community—beliefs passed down through generations and manifested through various traditional rituals.

Values Embodied in the “Ruwatan Rambut Gimbal” Tradition

The “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition embodies various values understood by the Dieng community. Based on interview findings, the most prominent values are cultural values, respect for ancestors, spiritual values, a sense of togetherness, and the value of mutual cooperation. Mr. Erwin stated that this tradition serves as a form of cultural preservation as well as a tribute to the ancestors who passed this tradition down to the Dieng community.

In addition, Mrs. Erma Setiawati explained that during the ruwatan ceremony, a selamatan or kenduri is usually held, involving family, relatives, and the surrounding community. These activities reflect the values of togetherness and mutual cooperation that are still upheld in the lives of the Dieng community. Mr. Ricky Setiawan echoed this sentiment, noting that the “ruwatan rambut gimbal”

tradition is a form of cultural preservation passed down through generations. These findings indicate that the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition not only holds cultural significance but also serves to strengthen social bonds within the Dieng community.

The Importance of Preserving the “Ruwatan Rambut Gimbal” Tradition

Amid the march of time and modernization, the people of Dieng continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to the continuity of the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition. This tradition is viewed as a cultural heritage that must be safeguarded so it does not disappear and remains known to future generations.

According to Mr. Erwin, the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition is a unique form of local wisdom not found in other regions, making its preservation essential. Mrs. Erma Setiawati also believes that this tradition has become one of Dieng’s cultural icons that must be passed down to future generations. Meanwhile, Mr. Ricky Setiawan stated that the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition also supports the development of tourism in Dieng, thereby providing economic benefits to the local community.

In addition to its cultural value, the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition also provides social and economic benefits to the community. The existence of this tradition attracts tourists to visit Dieng, thereby supporting local economic activities such as trade, tourism services, and lodging management. This finding aligns with the research by Putra et al. (2026), which states that the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition serves not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a cultural tourism attraction in Dieng.

Based on the research results, the people of Dieng view the preservation of the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition as an effort to safeguard their cultural identity, honor their ancestral heritage, and preserve one of the cultural treasures that is a source of pride for the Dieng community. Therefore, it is hoped that this tradition can continue to be preserved and passed down to future generations because cultural discourse and collective meanings are important elements in maintaining community identity (Laksono, 2026b).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the people of Dieng view the ruwatan rambut gimbal tradition as a cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation and preserved as part of their local cultural identity. This tradition is understood not only as a customary ritual but also as a form of respect for ancestors, which holds significant meaning in the lives of the community. The community holds diverse views regarding children with gimbal hair; some still associate it with spiritual aspects and the belief system that has developed in Dieng, while others view it as a distinctive cultural trait that sets Dieng apart from other regions. Regardless of these differences, the presence of children with gimbal hair is still accepted and valued as part of a cultural heritage that must be preserved. Furthermore, the “ruwatan rambut gimbal” tradition embodies cultural and spiritual values, reverence for ancestors, as well as a sense of community and mutual cooperation that contribute to strengthening social cohesion within the community. Therefore, efforts to preserve this tradition must continue through the transmission of these values to younger generations and fostering a deeper understanding among the community so that the tradition remains sustainable amidst the dynamics of social and cultural development.

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