

## Preserving the Mandi Safar Tradition to Foster Social Caring: A Case Study in South Halmahera

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**Abstract:** The Mandi Safar tradition has been an integral part of the cultural landscape in Baru village, located in the Obi subdistrict of South Halmahera regency. This ritual symbolizes self-purification through immersion in the river, representing a quest for divine protection and the desire to be spared from calamities and misfortunes. Nevertheless, some community members perceive this practice as a bid'ah, or innovation, that contradicts Islamic principles. Despite these differing views, the researcher identifies that the Mandi Safar tradition is valued by many as it significantly strengthens social bonds among villagers. This study aims to provide a comprehensive description of the efforts undertaken by the Baru village community to preserve the Mandi Safar tradition as a means to cultivate social care and solidarity among its citizens. Employing a qualitative research design with a case study approach, the findings reveal that the Mandi Safar tradition is executed in two key stages: (a) the Preparation stage, which entails gathering necessary materials such as paper, pencils, banana leaves, coconut leaves, and food; and (b) the Execution stage, which encompasses the journey to the ritual site, recitation of prayers, communal meals, and the Mandi Safar ritual itself. The Mandi Safar tradition embodies essential social values, including togetherness, affection, and harmony. These values play a crucial role in reinforcing kinship ties within the community and fostering a spirit of social caring among villagers. This study highlights the enduring significance of the Mandi Safar tradition in enhancing communal identity and social cohesion within the Baru village community.

**Keywords:** Baru Village, Tradition, Mandi Safar, Social Caring Character, Citizens

### INTRODUCTION

Mandi Safar is a tradition passed down through generations in various regions of Indonesia, particularly among the Malay communities (Fikria & Hasyim, 2023). Typically performed during the month of Safar in the Islamic calendar (Juliana et al., 2023), this ritual is believed

to serve as a means of self-purification, seeking protection from Allah, and safeguarding oneself from calamities or misfortunes. While the specific practices and timing of Mandi Safar may vary across regions, its core spiritual value remains the same: fostering a closer connection to God

and seeking divine protection (Suroyo et al., 2022).

Beyond its spiritual significance, Mandi Safar plays an important role in shaping the social character of the community. This tradition not only acts as a religious expression but also strengthens social bonds among residents, fostering a sense of togetherness and reinforcing values of solidarity. As noted by Suidat et al. (2022), "the character of a community is formed through a long process rooted in social practices passed down across generations."

Several studies have examined Mandi Safar from various perspectives. In Kotawaringin Timur, for instance, the tradition has profound spiritual, social, and communal values (Hasanah, 2022). In Bengkalis, it is viewed as a symbol of self-purification and an expression of gratitude for the smooth course of daily life (Juliana et al., 2023). Among the fishing communities in Batam, the ritual is believed to bring good fortune and safety while at sea (Ihsan, 2022). Despite the variations in practice across different regions, the essence of Mandi Safar consistently reflects the effort to maintain a balance between spiritual and social well-being.

However, not all community members support the practice of Mandi Safar. Some regard it as bid'ah, a religious innovation contrary to Islamic teachings, and even go so far as to label it as containing

elements of shirk, or polytheism. This divergence of opinions creates a dilemma between preserving a tradition rich in social and spiritual meaning and maintaining the purity of religious teachings. Nevertheless, from a social standpoint, Mandi Safar continues to serve as a gathering event that strengthens familial ties and fosters a sense of social care among community members.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in Baru village, Obi subdistrict, South Halmahera Regency, North Maluku, where the Mandi Safar tradition has been preserved for generations. Every year, on the last Wednesday of Safar in the Hijri calendar, the village residents gather to perform this ritual. The tradition, passed down through generations and involving neighboring communities, demonstrates its importance in maintaining social harmony. Fromm's concept of "Rootedness" (Noe et al., 2018) is relevant here, explaining how this tradition is deeply rooted in local culture, becoming an integral part of the community's way of life.

The Mandi Safar ritual not only involves physical and spiritual purification but also provides a space for warm and inclusive social interactions. Every individual, regardless of social status, participates in this tradition, fostering a sense of unity and fraternity. Fromm describes this as "Relatedness," referring to the emotional bonds formed through cultural practices (Noe et al., 2021), like

Mandi Safar, reinforcing communal unity and mutual care among villagers.

Moreover, the support from local government highlights the recognition of this tradition as an important cultural asset. Government participation in the event, along with the interest of local tourists who come to witness the ritual, has contributed to promoting Baru village as a cultural tourism destination.

In light of this phenomenon, this study aims to explore how the Mandi Safar tradition in Baru village contributes to strengthening the social caring character of its residents. Using a case study approach, this research will examine the social values embedded in the tradition and how this cultural practice contributes to the development of good citizenship. In the context of Civic Education, this aligns with the concept of Civic Education, which emphasizes civic virtues, including civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills (Wahab & Sapriya, 2023).

## **METHOD**

This research was conducted in Baru Village, Obi Subdistrict, South Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province. Baru Village was selected based on the consideration that traditional life is still deeply ingrained, particularly in the preservation of local wisdom such as the Mandi Safar tradition. This study is

qualitative, using a case study approach.

The research aims to obtain descriptive information regarding the efforts of the Baru village community in preserving the Mandi Safar tradition as a step towards strengthening the social care character of its citizens.

Data was collected using observation, interview, and documentation study techniques (Sugiyono, 2018). The observation technique was used to directly observe the Mandi Safar tradition, which is performed on the last Wednesday of the month of Safar (Hijri calendar). Interviews were conducted with several informants deemed competent to provide in-depth and comprehensive information related to the implementation of the Mandi Safar tradition. The informants were selected from religious leaders, traditional leaders, youth leaders, and the village government. Meanwhile, the documentation study was used to collect various materials such as videos and images related to the issue being studied.

After data collection, it was analyzed using techniques of data reduction, data presentation, and data verification (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Data reduction involves categorizing the collected data based on research questions. Subsequently, the data is presented using interpretative analysis, which is elaborated with various literature such as journal articles and books, allowing for the final verification and conclusion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Baru Village is located in Obi Subdistrict, South Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province. The population of this village is 3,031 people, consisting of 1,575 males and 1,456 females. The primary occupation of the Baru village people is farming, relying on agricultural products such as coconut, cloves, and nutmeg. Additionally, some community members work as civil servants, traders, fishermen, and laborers (source: Baru Village data, 2024).

The Mandi Safar tradition in Baru Village involves immersing oneself in the river during the month of Safar and has been carried out for a long time. This tradition is an important ritual because it involves many people, not only from Baru Village but also from surrounding communities. In their view, the Mandi Safar tradition serves as a spiritual symbol for seeking protection from Allah against disasters or calamities. Additionally, the Mandi Safar tradition is also seen as having social value, functioning as a means of fostering community bonds and strengthening social ties among the people. A more detailed explanation will follow:

First, the implementation of the Mandi Safar tradition. The Mandi Safar tradition is an annual event that is still preserved by the people of Baru Village. This tradition is carried out on the last Wednesday of the month of Safar. It is a

tradition passed down from generation to generation and has become a part of the community's life. The entire community participates in the ritual, not only the people of Baru Village but also those from the surrounding areas, and even the local government takes part in witnessing the Mandi Safar event. Men and women, adults and children alike, join together to enliven the ritual.

The process of carrying out the Mandi Safar ritual consists of several stages as follows:

### 1. Preparation Stage

The preparation for Mandi Safar begins after the Fajr prayer. The community starts preparing all the supplies and equipment for the event, such as a triangular piece of paper, a pencil, banana leaves, coconut leaves, and food provisions like rice cakes (*ketupat*), fish, and vegetables. The triangular paper is inscribed with verses from the Qur'an and Hadith using a pencil or ink that easily dissolves. This paper is then handed over to the religious leader (*Badan Sarah*) in Baru Village or an elder in the community, who is believed to have sufficient knowledge and religious competence to lead the Mandi Safar tradition. The community is highly enthusiastic about preparing the supplies for the event.

### 2. Implementation Stage

This stage begins with the journey to the Mandi Safar ritual site. The community,

having prepared their Mandi Safar supplies, gathers in front of the house of one of the religious leaders in Baru Village who will lead the ritual. The river location for Mandi Safar tradition is held is quite far, then the people leave in large numbers using motorbikes or cars. People who participate in this activity dress politely and neatly.

After arriving at the bathing location, the entire community gathers and puts down food or supplies that they have brought from home. The leader of the Mandi Safar tradition then stands and begins the ritual by reciting the prayers written on the triangular paper. The paper is then tied to a piece of wood, which is planted in the river. The selected prayers come from verses of the Qur'an and Hadith, asking for Allah's protection from various disasters or calamities. This stage concludes with the entire community sharing a meal from the food they brought from their homes (Figure 1).



#### Implementation of Eating and Bathing Together in the Mandi Safar Tradition

After the communal meal, the community members souse themselves into the river where the wooden stake with the prayer paper has been planted. Everyone appears joyful, some are bathing, joking

around in the river, greeting each other, sharing stories, and engaging in other activities that strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among the residents. Once the mandatory part of the Mandi Safar ritual is completed, the event continues with various activities known as the "people's festival," which includes entertainment, further adding to the excitement and happiness of all the villagers involved in Mandi Safar.

Secondly, the social values embodied in the Mandi Safar tradition include the values of togetherness, compassion, and harmony in life. In the community's view, the Mandi Safar tradition is not only seen as a spiritual practice but also holds significant social value. The social value is felt during the ritual, as the event indirectly serves as a gathering opportunity for people who haven't met for a long time due to being busy with work or daily activities. This is reflected in the statement of Munir Hi Halek, a community leader and the head of Baru Village, who said:

*The social values contained in the Mandi Safar tradition include the value of togetherness, where the community participates in this tradition collectively, which naturally enhances solidarity and harmony among them. The people support and respect each other. It is also common for people from outside Baru Village to join in and enliven the Mandi Safar tradition by gathering and mingling at the river, commonly known as Air Tabuji.*

When people gather and participate in the Mandi Safar ritual, individuals can interact directly, regardless of social status or background, naturally strengthening their sense of togetherness. According to Hilman et al. (2019), "local wisdom produces behavioral norms that guide actions locally, both in daily life and in preserving cultural heritage." The Mandi Safar ritual has a significant impact on individuals by highlighting the importance of solidarity, making them feel supported by their community when facing life's challenges. This solidarity strengthens unity and fosters a sense of collective togetherness.

In the context of the Social Interaction Theory proposed by George Herbert Mead, social interaction during the Mandi Safar ritual becomes a crucial moment in which individuals engage not only in physical behavior but also in the exchange of meanings and symbols. Mead suggests that an individual's identity and social meaning are formed through interactions with others (Edwards, 2023). During this ritual, each individual acts as part of a larger group, sharing values and norms embedded in the Mandi Safar tradition. This process enables the formation of a stronger collective identity, where individuals view themselves not as separate entities but as part of a broader community.

Moreover, Goffman emphasizes the concept of social dramaturgy, where individuals perform in front of others in

social situations. When participating in the Mandi Safar ritual, individuals "play the role" of community members engaged in collective activities. Through this participation, they strengthen their sense of belonging and develop deeper social bonds. The Mandi Safar ritual serves as a stage where all community members engage, regardless of social status, allowing closer interactions and reinforcing solidarity. This fosters a stronger sense of connection and unity among them.

Research also indicates that collective activities play a key role in rebuilding communal bonds, especially in the post-pandemic period marked by high levels of fragmentation and individualization (Louise Cunliffe et al., 2024). This suggests that communal togetherness does not occur naturally but is achieved through a process that acknowledges individual differences. Similar to the workplace, unity in the Mandi Safar ritual arises from the recognition of individual distinctions, but through social interaction and shared activities, they experience deeper commonalities.

Additionally, the Mandi Safar tradition reflects values of compassion, which is evident in the attitudes and behaviors of the community as they gather and share food. During the event, people exchange stories and engage in friendly banter, creating a relaxed and harmonious atmosphere, which further strengthens their kinship bonds. The Mandi Safar tradition

has positively impacted the community by enhancing the sensitivity of each village member. According to Shofiah (2023), this represents a commitment to preserving certain cultural practices, reinforcing collective action and love for one's nation. This is further supported by Karliana's statement in Martono et al. (2022), which asserts that indicators of national consciousness in rural communities typically include citizen participation, social empathy, cooperative sympathy, and the responsibility to preserve culture.

Furthermore, the Mandi Safar tradition reflects the value of harmony in life, as demonstrated through the interaction and communication during the ritual process. Communication is based on principles of tolerance, where individuals respect and appreciate one another. Even when someone lacks resources or equipment, the community helps each other. This approach strengthens the sense of belonging among community members, leading to high levels of solidarity and closer social bonds. According to Noe et al. (2018), in social culture, moral standards must exist to ensure that every member of society is aware of them and treats others accordingly.

The social values embedded in the Mandi Safar tradition, such as building emotional and moral communication with fellow residents facing life's difficulties, providing encouragement and mutual care,

demonstrating respect, and sharing resources with those in need during the tradition, all contribute to strengthening kinship and fraternity bonds. This indicates that the Baru community has a strong sense of social concern. The development of such a character has a positive impact on the social life of the community. This is evident after the Mandi Safar ritual, as people return to their daily activities with positive changes in their social interactions and more intensive engagement in maintaining communication and sharing stories.

The preservation of local cultural traditions, such as Mandi Safar, is a crucial element in maintaining ancestral heritage passed down through generations. The Baru community continues to practice this tradition, which implicitly contributes to the preservation of long-established values and customs. Through this practice, communities not only sustain their cultural identity but also strengthen their collective pride in their cultural heritage. Such traditions play a central role in the formation of collective identity and the building of shared pride.

In addition to aspects of cultural identity, community traditions serve as vital instruments in reinforcing social cohesion and solidarity among their members. These traditions, often expressed through festivals, rituals, or other cultural practices, create shared experiences that facilitate interaction and unify community members.

The interactions during these celebrations help establish strong social networks, deepening the sense of connection and togetherness among individuals. In preserving cultural identity, traditions become essential elements that enable communities to maintain their distinctive characteristics.

This notion is supported by various existing studies. Research conducted by Pratiwi et al. (2024) indicates that indigenous communities, such as the Badui, are capable of sustaining their collective identity through efforts to preserve their traditions. Social facilitation strategies that emphasize the importance of tradition have also proven effective in enhancing cohesion within these communities, demonstrating that local culture remains relevant in the face of contemporary challenges.

Moreover, local traditions function as social adhesives that strengthen solidarity within the community. A concrete example can be observed in the practices of Rewangan and Gotong Royong in rural communities, which have successfully nurtured multicultural values and fostered relationships among diverse ethnic and religious groups (Susanti et al., 2022). These traditions not only help prevent social conflict but also play a critical role in creating harmony and social stability at the community level.

In addition to reinforcing solidarity, traditions also act as catalysts in building

social networks. As seen in the Correfoc de la Mercè celebration in Barcelona, this cultural ritual is capable of generating significant social capital and enhancing community bonds through collective participation (Colombo et al., 2021). Such traditions make substantial contributions to stability and social cohesion within communities, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage amid the threats of modernization and globalization. Therefore, community traditions serve not only as mechanisms for cultural preservation but also as essential social tools for maintaining solidarity, togetherness, and harmony in contemporary society.

## CONCLUSION

Firstly, the Mandi Safar tradition is an annual event still preserved by the community of Desa Baru, Obi District, South Halmahera Regency. This tradition is carried out by the community on the Wednesday of the last week of Safar. It is a tradition passed down through generations, symbolizing a spiritual request for protection from Allah against calamities or disasters, as well as an opportunity to build social connections and communication to strengthen social bonds within the community. The Mandi Safar tradition involves two stages: 1) the preparation stage, which includes arranging all the necessary equipment and supplies such as a



sheet of paper, pencil, banana leaves, coconut leaves, and food, and 2) the implementation stage, which includes traveling to the ritual location, reciting prayers, sharing a meal, and performing the Mandi Safar ritual.

Secondly, the social values contained in the Mandi Safar tradition are 1) the value of togetherness, where people gather for the ritual, eating and bathing together in the river, thus interacting directly and strengthening their sense of unity, 2) the value of compassion, where they share stories and engage in friendly banter, creating a warm and harmonious atmosphere, and 3) the value of harmony in life, where they adhere to principles of tolerance by respecting and helping those in need during the ritual. These social values positively impact daily social relationships by further strengthening family ties and social bonds, as well as fostering a strong sense of social responsibility among the residents of Desa Baru.

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