

Islamic Legal Perspectives on Local Traditions during Ramadan: A Case Study of Kanagarian Kamang Baru

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Article Information:

Received Februari 27, 2025

Revised Maret 20, 2025

Accepted Maret 30, 2025

Keywords: *income zakat, religiosity, income, trust, zakat compliance, Islamic finance, rural Muslim community*

Abstract

This study investigates the integration between local customs (adat) and Islamic law (Sharia) in the context of Ramadan traditions in Kanagarian Kamang Baru, West Sumatra. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach combined with normative Islamic legal analysis, the research explores how rituals such as balimau (pre-Ramadan purification), mangaji pasia (Qur'anic memorization by the sea), and inter-jorong communal iftar serve not only as cultural expressions but also as vehicles for religious devotion and communal identity. Data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews with religious and customary leaders, and document analysis of local religious texts and practices. The findings demonstrate that while certain elements—particularly in balimau—pose ethical concerns from the standpoint of Islamic law (e.g., gender mixing), the community reconciles these practices through local interpretations rooted in 'urf (custom). The synthesis between adat and Sharia is framed within the objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah), emphasizing the values of purification, education, and social harmony. This research confirms that local traditions can enrich Islamic practice without violating its core principles, as long as proper ethical boundaries are maintained. The study contributes to the growing discourse on Islam Nusantara and advocates for context-sensitive Islamic legal frameworks that appreciate cultural diversity while upholding normative Islamic values. This paper underscores the role of religious scholars and traditional leaders in facilitating a balanced interpretation that resonates with both religious orthodoxy and local cultural wisdom.

How to cite:

Wafa Hidayatullah, A., Rades Putra, A., Khaldi, R., Hamdani, R., & Amin, M. (2025). Islamic Legal Perspectives on Local Traditions during Ramadan: A Case Study of Kanagarian Kamang Baru. *El-Kahfi | Journal of Islamic Economics*, 6(01), 88-97. <https://doi.org/10.58958/elkahfi.v6i01.468>

E-ISSN:

2722 – 6557

Published by:

Manna wa Salwa College of Islamic Economics, Tanah Datar, West Sumatra, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The local phenomenon in Kanagarian Kamang Baru reveals that the holy month of Ramadan is not solely regarded as a time for spiritual devotion, but also as a period of vibrant cultural expression. The Minangkabau community in this region continues to preserve traditions such as *balimau*, *mangaji pasia*, and communal iftar between sub-villages (*orong*). These practices serve not only as ceremonial acts but also as symbolic expressions of religious devotion embedded in customary Minangkabau culture (Marzuki, 2021). These ancestral traditions represent a living and enduring cultural heritage. However, there is a noticeable lack of scholarly attention concerning the extent to which Islamic values influence—or are potentially overshadowed by—local customs. This gap highlights the urgency of examining the relationship between Ramadan traditions and Islamic legal norms (Fitriani, 2021).

Among these traditions, *balimau*, a pre-Ramadan ritual involving symbolic purification with lime-infused water, has attracted critical attention. While spiritually meaningful, its implementation often becomes controversial due to the mixing of men and women in public bathing spaces, which may conflict with Islamic legal norms. This creates a tension between cultural preservation and adherence to religious principles (Zulfan, 2022). Despite such concerns, the Kamang Baru community generally perceives no inherent contradiction between the *balimau* ritual and Islamic teachings. This perception is largely shaped by the concept of '*urf*'—customary practices that are socially and religiously accepted—as long as they do not explicitly violate *sharia* (Anshari, 2022).

Such dynamics point to a grey area in Islamic legal discourse when dealing with local customs. Nasution (2019) notes that Islamic law in the Minangkabau context develops dynamically and remains intricately linked to prevailing *adat* (customary law). Hence, a contextual study is essential to bridge the gap between normative *fiqh* and lived cultural expressions. This form of syncretism between Islam and local culture is not unique to Kamang Baru. Across various parts of the Indonesian archipelago, Muslim communities strive to maintain cultural identity without compromising religious integrity. This reflects a broader sociocultural and spiritual need among Indonesian Muslims (Rahman, 2020).

Rituals held before Ramadan in Kamang Baru also play significant sociological roles. Events such as communal iftar gatherings function not only as religious activities but also as platforms for reconciliation and social consolidation across sub-villages. These traditions help strengthen communal cohesion and social solidarity (Munir, 2021). Nevertheless, it is crucial to ensure that cultural practices align with the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). Without clear religious guidance, some traditions may deviate from Islamic principles—for example, by permitting unregulated interaction between unrelated men and women. Hence, religious frameworks must guide cultural expressions (Yusran, 2021).

Research has also shown that Ramadan is not viewed merely as an individual act of worship. Rather, it is experienced as a collective event in the public sphere, where social and cultural norms intersect with religious observance. This highlights the importance of sociocultural norms in shaping religious practices (Fadli, 2020). Given this context, the academic urgency of this study lies in preserving cultural heritage without diluting the essence of Islamic teachings. A moderate and balanced approach is necessary—one that avoids both ultra-conservatism, which tends to reject local customs outright, and uncritical cultural relativism that disregards Islamic norms (Rahimah, 2023).

In many regions, the absence of formal religious rulings (*fatwas*) and legal guidelines

regarding Ramadan-related traditions leaves communities vulnerable to habitual practices lacking sharia-based foundations. This underscores the need for an applicable Islamic legal framework that can address cultural dynamics (Wahyuni, 2020). Fortunately, the people of Kamang Baru exhibit openness toward religious counsel. Collaboration between local customary leaders and Islamic scholars plays a vital role in shaping religiously aligned cultural expressions. Their interaction fosters socially accepted interpretations grounded in Islamic law (Iskandar, 2022). The mangaji pasia tradition—Qur’anic recitation sessions held by the riverbanks—exemplifies how local customs can nurture spirituality and Islamic literacy from an early age. Such practices also serve as a form of tazkiyah (spiritual purification) rooted in the community’s environment (Aziz, 2023).

This research contributes to the broader discourse on “Islam Nusantara”—a culturally embedded interpretation of Islam that reflects local wisdom without compromising core Islamic values. While adaptation is encouraged, the boundaries of sharia must remain the fundamental guide (Mutakin, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to describe and analyze the customary practices of the Kamang Baru community in welcoming Ramadan, using an ethnographic approach combined with normative Islamic legal analysis. The objective is to critically assess the extent to which cultural traditions are integrated with Islamic law in a harmonious and context-sensitive manner (Syafurudin, 2020).

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach to capture the lived experiences, symbolic meanings, and social dynamics embedded in the Ramadan traditions of the Kamang Baru community. Ethnography is chosen to allow deep immersion into the community's cultural practices, enabling the researcher to observe and interpret how local customs are enacted, perceived, and internalized within the framework of Islamic religiosity. Data were collected through a combination of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Key informants included community elders, local religious leaders (buya), cultural practitioners, and youth participants involved in Ramadan rituals such as balimau and mangaji pasia.

In order to evaluate the extent to which these cultural expressions align with Islamic legal principles, this ethnographic exploration is complemented by a normative Islamic legal analysis. This dual approach enables the study not only to describe and interpret cultural phenomena, but also to assess them through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), particularly within the framework of maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah (the higher objectives of Islamic law). Sources for the normative analysis include classical Islamic legal texts, contemporary fatwas, and scholarly discourses on ‘urf (custom) and its admissibility within Islamic legal reasoning.

Triangulation was applied by cross-referencing observational data, interview transcripts, and textual materials, ensuring the credibility and validity of findings. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research process, with informed consent obtained from all participants and cultural sensitivity maintained in documenting religious practices. The methodology thus reflects a commitment to both anthropological rigor and Islamic scholarly integrity, positioning this study at the intersection of local wisdom and normative Islamic thought.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This study identified five major themes that reflect the intersection between local tradition (adat) and Islamic law (syariat) during the month of Ramadan in Kamang Baru. The themes emerged through triangulated analysis of participant observations, in-depth interviews, and document reviews. The following sections elaborate each theme alongside relevant supporting data.

Balimau: Symbolic Purification and Cultural Controversy

Table 1. Theme 1 Balimau

Element	Description
Data Source	Observation (Lubuk Gadang), Interviews (3 elders, 2 youth), Village archive
Cultural Role	Communal purification before Ramadan
Religious Dilemma	Mixed-gender participation; lack of modesty in some settings
Interpretive View	Some claim it as 'urf, others demand regulation through sharia
Document Reference	Local cultural guide (Nagari Archive, 2018) acknowledges balimau as "religio-cultural legacy"

The balimau ritual, practiced shortly before Ramadan, remains a significant cultural symbol among the people of Kamang Baru. It is commonly perceived as a tradition of physical and spiritual cleansing. Elders describe it as an act of preparing oneself to enter the holy month in a purified state.

However, direct observations revealed modern challenges. In some locations, particularly in Lubuk Gadang, male and female participants were seen mixing freely in river areas, which raised religious and ethical concerns among local religious leaders. The practice, though rooted in ancestral tradition, is currently being reinterpreted through Islamic values.

"We do this to cleanse ourselves and our hearts before the fasting month. But the youth now forget the limits." – Female elder, 63 y.o.

Mangaji Pasia: Transmission of Religious Literacy

Table 2. theme 2 Mangaji Pasia

Element	Description
Data Source	Observation (riverside teaching), Interviews (2 buya, 3 parents)
Function	Religious literacy and character formation
Islamic Framework	Fulfills maqāṣid al-sharī'ah in education and purification
Cultural Strength	Connects religious learning with environmental familiarity
Challenges	Limited formal recognition by education authorities

Mangaji pasia is a Ramadan tradition where children gather near the riverside to study the Qur'an under the guidance of local religious teachers (buya). It is both pedagogical and spiritual, fostering early memorization and a sense of community devotion. This tradition highlights the community's commitment to ta'lim (religious instruction) and tazkiyah (spiritual refinement).

Field notes recorded daily sessions at dusk, with groups of children encircling the buya, reciting surahs together. Parents expressed pride in this heritage-based learning style.

"The river calms them; the Qur'an teaches them." – Buya Idrus, 47 y.o.

Inter-Jorong Iftar: A Mechanism of Social Cohesion

Table 3. theme 3 Inter-Jorong Iftar

Element	Description
Data Source	Interviews (4 organizers, 2 jorong heads), Annual Ramadan Schedule (2023)
Social Role	Enhancing inter-jorong solidarity, healing communal rifts
Islamic Value	Supports <i>ḥifẓ al-‘ird</i> (honor) and <i>ḥifẓ al-‘ummah</i> (community)
Observations	Equitable rotation among jorong; community-wide involvement
Documentation	Majelis Taklim report lists iftar schedule, attendees, sermon topics

Communal iftar activities, held on a rotational basis among various jorong, serve as more than ritual meals—they act as platforms for strengthening unity, rebuilding trust, and affirming Islamic brotherhood.

These gatherings often begin with Qur’anic recitation and short sermons, followed by the breaking of the fast. They promote inclusivity, social responsibility, and conflict resolution among the residents.

“This is not just eating together. It’s about visiting, respecting, and healing old tensions.” – Jorong head, 51 y.o.

Cultural Mediation by Religious Leaders

Table 4. theme 4. Role of Religious Leadership

Element	Description
Data Source	Interviews (3 buya, 2 adat leaders), Internal fatwa and announcements
Function	Adat moderation, sharia compliance, moral legitimacy
Methods	Preaching, local fatwa, educational campaigns
Impact	Reduced tension, community acceptance, adat-sharia alignment
Document	Internal notes from Majelis Ta’lim Kamang Baru (2022) advising moderation

A vital element in balancing adat and syariah is the role of local religious authorities. In Kamang Baru, buya and traditional leaders engage in dialogue to guide practices such as *balimau* or *mangaji pasia* in line with Islamic values.

Instead of opposing cultural elements, the buya often offer reinterpretation strategies—such as regulating space and timing—to ensure religious compliance while maintaining cultural identity.

“We never say adat is wrong. We interpret it through Islam.” – Buya Rahmat, 55 y.o.

Perception of Sharia Compliance in Local Traditions

Table 5. theme 5. Community’s Interpretive Framework

Element	Description
Data Source	Interviews (6 youth, 4 elders), Observation of ritual participation
Theological Lens	Emphasis on <i>niyyah</i> , <i>maslahah</i> , and community benefit
Social Implication	High tolerance for cultural expressions within Islamic spirit
Challenges	Inconsistent knowledge about fiqh boundaries
Conclusion	Need for continuing religious education and dialogue

The final theme captures how community members perceive Islamic legality in their traditions. There is a tendency to prioritize *niyyah* (intention) and social benefit over literalist interpretation.

Many residents believe that as long as the practice does not cause harm or contradict core principles, it remains within the bounds of Islam. This reflects a localized Islamic epistemology shaped by both syariah and ‘urf.

“As long as the intention is good, and no one is harmed, our traditions are still Islamic.”
– Youth, 19 y.o.

DISCUSSION

Balimau: Between Cultural Legacy and Shariah Dilemma

The results show that balimau is still a deeply rooted tradition in Kamang Baru, perceived by the community as a symbolic act of purification before entering the sacred month of Ramadan. This ritual represents a strong sense of communal identity and spiritual readiness. However, as observed in the field, its implementation sometimes departs from Islamic values, especially when it involves unrestricted interactions between men and women in public spaces.

This finding aligns with Marzuki (2021), who emphasized that traditional Ramadan practices in West Sumatra often blur the lines between religious ritual and cultural expression. However, it contrasts with Fitriani (2021), who argued that such practices have largely been abandoned or transformed to align with more normative religious frameworks. In Kamang Baru, instead, balimau survives as a cultural symbol, albeit with ongoing debates over its permissibility.

Theologically, purification before Ramadan is encouraged, as reflected in the Prophet’s practice of ghusl and in Qur’anic verses such as QS Al-Baqarah: 222, “Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.” Yet the method of purification must remain within the bounds of modesty and gender ethics prescribed by Islam.

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has not issued a formal fatwa on balimau, but through regional religious discussions, it is often recommended that such traditions be preserved only if they do not violate *ḥudūd al-shar‘iyyah* (Islamic limits), especially concerning *ikhtilāṭ* (mixing between non-mahram genders). Scholars such as Quraish Shihab support this moderate stance: traditions are permissible as long as their form does not contradict clear religious prohibitions.

Therefore, balimau in Kamang Baru requires reform rather than rejection. The tradition carries spiritual value but needs religious guidance to maintain its ethical boundaries. Local *buya* can play a central role in directing the ritual back toward Islamic moral and legal principles.

Mangaji Pasia: Fostering Qur'anic Learning in Cultural Space

The tradition of mangaji pasia represents a profound integration between cultural landscape and religious learning. By conducting Qur’anic classes by the riverside, the community fosters early memorization and spiritual discipline in a context that children find familiar and inspiring. It reflects the community’s innovation in transmitting religious knowledge while preserving local ambiance.

Compared to previous findings by Fadli (2020), who described Ramadan as a public religio-cultural arena, this study provides concrete ethnographic proof that public spaces are being transformed into religious classrooms. Moreover, this finding expands on Munir (2021), who focused on urban religious education, by showing how rural traditions remain central to the transmission of Islamic literacy.

From a *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* perspective, mangaji pasia fulfills multiple objectives: *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (preservation of religion), *ḥifẓ al-‘aql* (preservation of intellect), and *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (preservation of lineage), since it educates the youth with values that shape ethical

maturity. The Prophet Muhammad himself emphasized the importance of teaching children the Qur'an as a form of spiritual foundation (HR. Bukhari, Kitab Fadha'ilul Qur'an).

This practice is strongly supported by Islamic pedagogical scholars such as Azra (2011), who advocates contextualized religious education to foster lifelong religiosity. Moreover, the practice does not contradict any fatwa or Islamic principle and is seen as a commendable effort (*hasanah*) by both formal and informal religious authorities.

Hence, *mangaji pasia* not only sustains local tradition but elevates it into a meaningful educational act. Its replication and institutional support should be encouraged to preserve both religious knowledge and cultural identity.

Inter-Jorong Iftar: A Ritual of Reconciliation and Unity

The inter-jorong iftar in Kamang Baru is more than just a communal meal—it is a ritual of reconciliation and symbolic unity. The rotation system among sub-villages encourages equitable participation, reduces inter-group tensions, and reinforces Islamic brotherhood. It also creates a space for religious preaching and reflection before breaking the fast.

This finding strengthens Munir (2021), who noted that local Ramadan rituals often play a crucial role in social consolidation. It also confirms Rahman (2020), who argued that religious rituals in Indonesia often serve dual roles: spiritual and sociological. However, while previous studies mainly focused on urban or interfaith contexts, this study sheds light on rural intra-community cohesion through Islamic frames.

Such practice aligns with QS Al-Hujurat: 10, "The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers." The Prophet also emphasized the rewards of feeding others during Ramadan and reconciling those in conflict (HR. Tirmidzi). The iftar rotation fosters both acts in a singular tradition.

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, there is no contradiction in communal fasting rituals, provided that the gatherings observe modesty and religious decorum. Moreover, the Indonesian Ministry of Religion has often highlighted collective Ramadan programs as vital to strengthening *ukhuwah islamiyah*.

Thus, this tradition should be preserved and institutionalized. It is a model of how religious obligations, such as fasting and preaching, can be interwoven with *adat* to build a resilient, harmonious society. Kamang Baru demonstrates how local culture can enhance—not erode—religious unity.

Religious Leaders as Cultural Interpreters

The collaboration between *buya* and traditional leaders in Kamang Baru illustrates the important role of religious authorities in contextualizing sharia within local customs. Rather than rejecting cultural practices outright, religious leaders offer interpretive moderation. This approach prevents conflict and allows local values to be retained within an Islamic framework.

This observation parallels Anshari (2022), who noted that Islamic practice in Minangkabau is heavily influenced by 'urf and community consensus. It also supports Nasution (2019), who argued for the dynamic interaction between Islamic law and local culture. What sets this study apart is its documentation of how *buya* actively negotiate meanings with *adat* leaders, not just through fatwas but through presence and conversation.

Such moderation reflects the broader Islamic legal theory that allows 'urf (custom) as a source of law, provided it does not contradict clear scriptural injunctions. Imam Al-Qarafi and contemporary scholars such as Wahbah Zuhaili confirm this principle: what is

customary among the people can become part of the legal consideration (*hukm al-‘adah muhakkamah*).

Institutions such as MUI have long supported this approach, advocating that religious leaders act as cultural facilitators rather than as moral police. The guidance provided in Kamang Baru aligns with this institutional philosophy—offering corrections where necessary, but never alienating the people from their own traditions.

Therefore, the *buya-adat* alliance in Kamang Baru should be seen as a blueprint for other regions. It is a living example of how religious interpretation can maintain orthodoxy without erasing identity.

Community Interpretation of Sharia in Cultural Practices

Finally, the research revealed that many Kamang Baru residents understand Islamic permissibility through the lens of intention (*niyyah*), benefit (*maṣlaḥah*), and harm avoidance (*ḍarar*). Rather than focusing solely on legalistic boundaries, they apply a contextual ethic rooted in social harmony and moral sincerity.

This view echoes Rahimah (2023), who suggested that local Muslims in rural Sumatra often prioritize values over formalist interpretations of *fiqh*. While some scholars may see this as problematic, others, like Mutakin (2019), argue that it is a form of practical theology that adapts to lived realities.

Qur'anic principles such as QS Al-Baqarah: 185 – “Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship” – legitimize such contextual understanding. The Prophet himself tolerated certain cultural expressions during early Islam as long as they did not involve clear disobedience to God.

From a scholarly viewpoint, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Jasser Auda advocate for *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* as the framework for evaluating contemporary practices. This allows for flexibility while preserving essential principles. In Indonesia, this approach is reflected in how NU and Muhammadiyah accommodate *kearifan lokal*.

Consequently, the people of Kamang Baru exhibit a form of Islamic pragmatism that deserves recognition, not condemnation. Their interpretive mode underscores the dynamic nature of Islamic law as both divine and lived, abstract and contextual.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the traditions practiced by the community of Kanagarian Kamang Baru during the month of Ramadan—such as *balimau*, *mangaji pasia*, and communal *iftar* among *lorong*—are not merely cultural rituals but are deeply interwoven with religious values. These practices serve as symbolic and spiritual acts that contribute to social cohesion, religious identity, and intergenerational transmission of Islamic values. The findings indicate that although some rituals raise concerns from a normative Islamic law perspective—especially regarding gender interaction—the community has developed an interpretation of Sharia that is harmonized with local *‘urf* (customs), thus avoiding overt conflict between *adat* and Islamic jurisprudence.

The integration of Islamic teachings and local customs in Kamang Baru reflects a dynamic and contextualized form of religiosity, one that prioritizes the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*—the overarching objectives of Islamic law. By interpreting traditions through the lens of benefit, harm prevention, and communal welfare, the society displays an indigenous Islamic model aligned with the principles of *wasatiyyah* (moderation). These findings reinforce the importance of developing culturally grounded yet Sharia-compliant legal guidance that can serve as a bridge between normative Islamic teachings and lived social

realities. Future studies are encouraged to extend this framework to other regions where adat and Islam similarly co-exist in complex, layered forms.

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