

ARTICLE

Preserving Cultural Identity Through *Tahlilan*: Strengthening Social Solidarity in Madura

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Abstract

The *tahlilan* tradition in Madura serves not only as a religious ritual but also as a significant social and cultural mechanism that strengthens communal bonds. In the context of Madura, *tahlilan* goes beyond prayer, representing solidarity, empathy, and social cohesion among community members. This study aims to analyze how *tahlilan* influences social solidarity and harmony within Madurese society, focusing on its role in community integration and the maintenance of social ties. A qualitative case study method was employed, involving interviews with local religious leaders, community figures, and participants in the *tahlilan* rituals, along with observations of religious practices in Pasean, Pamekasan. The results show that *tahlilan* plays a crucial role in reinforcing collective identity and social harmony in Madura. It fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support across social classes, while also serving as a mechanism for collective grieving and emotional expression. However, financial pressures related to hosting *tahlilan* can lead to social strain, particularly among lower-income families. This study highlights the cultural significance of *tahlilan* and its impact on social dynamics but acknowledges that further research is needed to explore economic challenges and evolving practices in different socio-economic contexts.

Keywords: *Social Solidarity; Social Cohesion; Religious Traditions; Harmonies*

Tradisi tahlilan di Madura tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai ritual keagamaan, tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme sosial dan budaya yang memperkuat ikatan komunal. Dalam konteks Madura, tahlilan melampaui doa, mencerminkan solidaritas, empati, dan kohesi sosial di antara anggota masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana tahlilan memengaruhi solidaritas sosial dan harmoni dalam masyarakat Madura, dengan fokus pada peran tradisi ini dalam integrasi komunitas dan pemeliharaan hubungan sosial. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kasus kualitatif, melibatkan wawancara dengan tokoh agama, tokoh masyarakat, dan peserta tahlilan, serta observasi langsung terhadap praktik keagamaan di Pasean, Pamekasan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tahlilan berperan penting dalam memperkuat identitas kolektif dan harmoni sosial di Madura. Tradisi ini mendorong rasa memiliki dan saling mendukung di berbagai lapisan masyarakat, serta menjadi mekanisme untuk meredakan duka bersama. Namun, tekanan finansial terkait pelaksanaan tahlilan dapat menimbulkan beban sosial, terutama bagi keluarga berpenghasilan rendah. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya tahlilan secara budaya dan pengaruhnya terhadap dinamika sosial, namun diperlukan penelitian lebih lanjut untuk mengeksplorasi tantangan ekonomi dan perubahan praktik dalam konteks sosial-ekonomi yang berbeda.

A. INTRODUCTION

Tahlilan, a religious tradition in Madura, involves communal prayers for the deceased, typically held on specific days following death, such as the third, seventh, and 100th days, as well as annual commemorations. The practice, rooted in the recitation of Quranic verses, prayers, and zikr (remembrance of God), carries deep cultural and spiritual significance in Madurese society. Beyond being a religious ritual, *tahlilan* fosters a strong sense of solidarity and social cohesion within the community, serving as a means to honor the deceased while strengthening bonds among neighbors through mutual support and cooperation (Khairil Musthafa, Prasetyo, and Maghfuri 2023; Mas'ari and Syamsuatir 2017).

Despite its significance, the sociological aspects of *tahlilan* in Madura have been understudied, particularly regarding how it functions as a social mechanism to preserve harmony and collective identity. Existing literature primarily focuses on Islamic jurisprudential perspectives, often overlooking the broader social dynamics that *tahlilan* sustains within the community. This gap highlights the need to explore how religious traditions like *tahlilan* contribute to maintaining social order, mitigating conflicts, and managing communal relationships in the face of modern societal changes (Misrawi 2013; Syarif, Mughni, and Hannan 2020).

The present study addresses this gap by examining how *tahlilan*, beyond its religious dimensions, reinforces social cohesion in Madura, where religious traditions remain deeply embedded in cultural practices. By focusing on the role of *tahlilan* in fostering social harmony, the research aims to understand its contribution to the integration of community members and its impact on social structures. Given the ongoing modernization and societal shifts, this study is particularly relevant in exploring how such traditions can persist and evolve as vital elements of communal life in Madura. The findings are expected to enhance the academic discourse on religious practices as tools for social integration and

offer fresh insights into the unique ways Madurese society navigates cultural continuity in an era of change.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, with a specific focus on a case study method (Darmalaksana 2020; Sugiyono 2017). The case study method was chosen to deeply analyze the cultural and religious tradition of *Tahlilan* among the Madurese community in Pasean, Pamekasan. This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of why the community continues to preserve and practice *Tahlilan* across different social strata, from the lower to upper classes. The aim is to understand the social, religious, and cultural context in which this practice thrives, offering insights into how it reinforces social cohesion and community solidarity.

Data collection techniques employed in this research include interviews, observations, and document analysis (Astutik and Sarmini 2014; Nawawi and Rudini 2020). Interviews were conducted with key figures such as religious leaders, local community leaders, and residents, allowing for a thorough and informative exploration of the role of *Tahlilan* in the community. The interviews aimed to gather comprehensive data, focusing on various demographic aspects such as age, gender, and profession to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the participants' perspectives. Observations, both participatory and non-participatory, were carried out to objectively record *Tahlilan* practices. These observations took place in locations selected for their social representativeness and accessibility, with data being recorded through field notes, audio recordings, and photographs. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key themes, such as patterns of social interaction and the role of *Tahlilan* in fostering community solidarity.

Additionally, document analysis played a crucial role in enriching the understanding of *Tahlilan* practices. The documents analyzed included

local archives, historical village records, and personal diaries documenting the practice of *Tahlilan* over generations. These sources provided a historical and sociological context, shedding light on how *Tahlilan* has evolved and persisted over time. The analysis of these documents helped identify historical patterns and shifts in practice, contributing to a broader understanding of the factors that sustain *Tahlilan* as a key element of social solidarity in Madura.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (Arikunto 2018; Widodo 2018) model, consisting of three primary steps: data display, data reduction, and data verification. Data display involved presenting information in tables, graphs, or descriptive narratives to facilitate pattern recognition. Data reduction focused on filtering and refining the most relevant and meaningful data while eliminating less significant information. Finally, data verification ensured the validity of findings through triangulation with other data sources, comparing results with existing theories and literature. This systematic approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of how *Tahlilan* contributes to social cohesion in the Madurese community.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Understanding the Cultural Tradition of Tahlilan in Pasean, Madura

Pasean is a village and sub-district located in Pamekasan Regency, situated near the northern coast of Pamekasan, known as the "Pantura" (northern coast region). Geographically, the area of Pasean is characterized by hot temperatures and reddish soil. The primary livelihoods of the people in Pasean are farming and fishing, with tobacco being the dominant agricultural product. Pamekasan itself is recognized as the second-largest tobacco-producing region in Java, after Temanggung.

In religious terms, Pasean is well-known as a "*kampung santri*" or a village of Islamic students, due to its strong Islamic educational tradition.

It is home to numerous mosques, prayer rooms, and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Almost every village in Pasean has a mosque, *musholla* (small prayer house), and a *pesantren*, which plays a pivotal role in the community's religious and cultural life. In particular, the village of Dungendak on Jl. Tlontoraja stands out, with a large population of *santri* (Islamic students) who engage in religious activities such as *rihlah* (spiritual journeys), where they visit other villages, offering prayers and greetings to local residents.

One of the most enduring religious traditions in Pasean is the practice of *tahlilan*, a communal prayer gathering held in memory of a deceased person. The practice typically involves the recitation of the *tahlil* (the Islamic declaration of faith) and other prayers, either in a home or a mosque, as a way of paying tribute to the deceased.

Tahlilan is a common practice in Madurese society, much like in many other Muslim communities across Indonesia. It involves a series of prayers and recitations held to commemorate and pray for those who have passed away. Usually, it is performed as part of a larger gathering or religious meeting organized by the family or community to mark the passing of a loved one. (Interview with Kiyai Muhni 2023).

This statement is further supported by Warisno (2017), who notes that in Madurese society, *tahlilan* is usually performed according to Islamic teachings and is often held in the home of the bereaved family or in a mosque. Attendees gather to recite Quranic verses, offer collective prayers, and reflect on the virtues of the deceased. However, it is essential to recognize that the practice of *tahlilan* can vary across different regions and communities in Madura, with certain local traditions and individual religious interpretations influencing its performance.

The tradition of *tahlilan* has long been a common practice in Madurese society whenever someone passes away. The community comes together to offer mutual support, working collectively to help the bereaved family. Usually, *tahlilan* is held immediately after the death of a family member, and the prayers typically include the recitation of the *tahlil* and Surah Yasin from the Quran. (Interview 2023).

The tradition of *tahlilan* in Pasean is more than just a religious ritual; it is a reflection of the deep social bonds and cultural values that are central to Madurese society.

The *tahlil* tradition in Madura holds profound meaning and has become an integral part of community life. It not only serves as a religious practice but has also evolved into a symbol of spirituality passed down from generation to generation, reinforcing the strong sense of togetherness and social solidarity within the Madurese community. (Interview with Kiyai Hori 2023).

Ultimately, *tahlilan* in Madura is not merely a religious ceremony; it is a cultural practice that embodies empathy, solidarity, and mutual support. The tradition encourages the community to come together during times of loss, providing emotional and spiritual strength to one another, which fosters a sense of unity and shared responsibility in the face of life's challenges.

2. *Tahlilan and Its Contribution to Religious Harmony in Madura*

The *tahlilan* tradition in Pasean, Pamekasan, plays a significant role in fostering religious harmony.

In the socio-religious context of Madura, *tahlil* is not merely a formal event but also carries a deep spiritual meaning. Every time *tahlil* is held, it is not only a religious obligation but also a sincere expression of care and solidarity among the Madurese community. (Interview with Kiyai Muhni 2023)

This sentiment highlights the spiritual and communal significance of *tahlilan* as a practice that reinforces both religious values and social cohesion.

The tradition of *tahlil* in Madura is far more than a religious ritual; it is a mechanism that demonstrates the strength of social, spiritual, and communal values deeply embedded in the local culture. From a sociological perspective, the *tahlil* practice in Madura reflects complex social dynamics and serves as a medium for community members to engage with one another in meaningful ways. As noted by (Yogyakarta 2021), *tahlilan* functions as both a religious and social event, linking individuals in the community and reinforcing bonds through shared religious and social practices. This is consistent with the observations of (Sutomo and Budihardjo 2021), who argue that *tahlilan* serves as a primary stage for the expression of social values, solidarity, and social cohesion.

Further, *tahlilan* also showcases the pivotal role played by religious leaders in shaping and maintaining social structures. As highlighted by (Scott, Jiang, Wildman, and Griffith 2018), religious figures in Madura do more than guide the community in spiritual matters—they are essential agents of social cohesion, helping to define and preserve the social norms and values contained within practices like *tahlilan*. Through their leadership, these figures contribute to the ongoing process of identity formation within the Madurese community, ensuring that religious and cultural values are transmitted and upheld.

In addition, *tahlilan* also represents a symbolic form of collective identity, as pointed out by (Apriani and Aryani 2022). The ritual is not merely a religious event but an essential element of social identity in Madura. It forms part of the broader social fabric, reflecting how religious and social values are intertwined to create a unified sense of belonging. The role of *tahlilan* in promoting and preserving communal solidarity extends beyond its spiritual dimensions, offering a lens through which to view how Madurese society navigates social relations.

The importance of *tahlilan* is also underscored by the broader body of research that views it as a powerful reflection of Indonesia's rich social,

religious, and cultural heritage. Scholars such as (Abdullah et al. 2019) argue that *tahlilan* is a social phenomenon that illuminates the intricate relationships between religion, culture, and community practices in Indonesia. From an anthropological perspective, *tahlilan* is an example of how communities maintain their collective identity, offering solidarity, support, and empathy through a shared ritual.

In sum, *tahlilan* in Pasean is a multifaceted tradition that reflects both religious devotion and social unity. It reinforces communal bonds, supports individuals through times of grief, and serves as a mechanism for ensuring that cultural and religious values are passed from one generation to the next. This blending of the spiritual and social elements highlights the unique role of *tahlilan* in maintaining harmony within the Madurese community, while also serving as a valuable subject for sociological and anthropological study.

3. The Unique Role of Tahlilan in Madura's Social and Cultural Fabric

The *tahlilan* tradition in Madura stands out in several ways compared to other regions in Indonesia, both in its execution and the underlying social and cultural values it embodies. In Madura, *tahlilan* is not merely a religious ritual but an integral part of social life that reinforces the collective identity of the community. It is a communal practice that often involves the entire neighborhood, transcending social and economic boundaries. As Sisma Yani Tumangor and Nia Kurniati Syam (2024) explain, *tahlilan* in Madura serves as an effective social mechanism to strengthen relationships among individuals within the community, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity.

One of the most distinctive features of *tahlilan* in Madura is the incorporation of local cultural elements alongside Islamic values. Although the core of *tahlilan* revolves around collective prayers for the deceased, its practice in Madura is often enriched with local customs. These include the serving of traditional Madurese food and the use of the Madurese language

in some prayers. Additionally, specific rituals unique to Madura, such as ceremonies before or after the *tahlilan*, are performed to seek protection and blessings for the bereaved family (Mas'ari and Syamsuatir 2017). These unique elements highlight the deep integration of *tahlilan* into the cultural and spiritual life of the Madurese people.

The duration and frequency of *tahlilan* in Madura also differ from practices in other regions. While in many areas *tahlilan* is typically held for seven consecutive days following a death, in Madura, the ritual can extend far longer – up to 40 days, 100 days, and even one year, culminating in a grand commemoration on the 1000th day, known as *seribu dina* (Suyadi, 2022). This extended observance reflects the profound respect the Madurese hold for their ancestors and the deceased, as well as their deep commitment to maintaining the continuity of this tradition over time (Mas'udi 2015).

4. *Tahlilan as a Social Cohesion Mechanism*

Beyond its religious significance, *tahlilan* plays a prominent social role in Madura, serving as a powerful tool for strengthening community solidarity. It is not just an occasion for the bereaved family but an event where neighbors, friends, and even distant community members come together. This participation reflects the strong communal spirit and the enduring tradition of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) in Madura. The gathering fosters social networks, where everyone – regardless of their social or economic status – comes together to help, share, and support one another, contributing to social cohesion and harmony within the community (Muhammad 2020; Sari 2019; Studi et al. 2021).

The local perspective on *tahlilan* further underscores its importance in maintaining cultural continuity and social harmony. For the people of Madura, *tahlilan* is not merely an obligation but an expression of respect for ancestral values and their cultural identity. The practice allows the Madurese to preserve their traditions across generations, ensuring that

tahlilan remains a vital part of their daily lives. It acts as a bridge that links the past with the present, keeping cultural and spiritual values alive and ensuring that they are passed down to future generations (Hidayati 2009; Qadariyah and Susantin 2020).

5. *Tahlilan as a Symbol of Religious Harmony in Madura*

According to local figures and community members interviewed, such as Muhni, *tahlilan* in Madura is not just a routine gathering or event. He stated, “The *tahlilan* tradition in Madura is not merely a regular event or gathering but a spiritual and ritual heritage that has been preserved by the Madurese people from generation to generation. This study confirms that *tahlilan* is more than just a religious obligation – it is a symbol of harmony and solemnity in the life of the community. It is reflected in the way people support and console each other during times of loss, with *tahlilan* being an act of reciting ‘*tahlil*’ and offering prayers for the deceased” (Interview 2023).

Muhni, who often leads *tahlilan* ceremonies in Pasean, Pamekasan, emphasized that the tradition has deep spiritual roots, passed down over generations and continuously preserved. The role of *tahlilan* is strengthened by its foundations in Islamic teachings from the Quran and Hadith, according to religious leaders and community figures. Far from being merely a social event, *tahlilan* has come to symbolize peace and tranquility within Madurese society, where the community comes together to offer mutual support during times of grief (Mas’ari and Syamsuatir 2017).

The findings from interviews suggest that *tahlilan* in Madura goes beyond being just a set of ritual activities. It represents a spiritual and cultural heritage deeply embedded in the social fabric of Madurese life. The practice, reinforced by Islamic teachings, has become a symbol of harmony and peace, particularly during moments of loss. The tradition serves as a way for people to express solidarity and compassion, reinforcing the social

bonds within the community (Hidayati 2009; Qadariyah and Susantin 2020).

6. *Challenges and Conflicts Surrounding Tahlilan in Madura*

However, it is important to acknowledge that the *tahlilan* tradition is not without challenges. As one interviewee noted, "For families with limited financial means, hosting *tahlilan* can be a burden. Some families end up borrowing money from neighbors to cover the costs, even though the tradition is not obligatory. It has become deeply ingrained in the community, making it difficult to avoid participation, even when resources are scarce" (Interview 2023). This points to a tension between the cultural importance of *tahlilan* and the financial strain it can place on families, especially in rural Madura, where economic hardship is common.

Tabel 1. Pasean Village Area That Conducts *Tahlilan*

Name of Village, Village, Hamlet	Presented
Dungendak	90 % <i>Participating</i>
Tlontoraja	80% <i>Participating</i>
Batu kerbuy	80% <i>Participating</i>
Ahatan	80% <i>Participating</i>
Sotaber	80% <i>Participating</i>

Source: Results of Data Processing from Interviews with Informants

Despite these challenges, the data collected from various villages in Pasean reveals that the majority of residents continue to participate in *tahlilan*, even if it means relying on financial help from neighbors or family members. The communal nature of *tahlilan* ensures that even those with limited means are supported, as the community often contributes food, beverages, and other necessities for the event. This highlights the deep

sense of collective responsibility and support that underpins the *tahlilan* tradition in Madura, ensuring its continued practice across generations.

In conclusion, *tahlilan* in Madura is not merely a religious ritual but a crucial social institution that reinforces the values of solidarity, mutual aid, and cultural continuity. Despite facing modern challenges, such as economic pressures and shifting generational attitudes, *tahlilan* remains a vital part of Madurese life. It serves as a testament to the resilience of traditional practices in maintaining social harmony and preserving cultural identity in an ever-changing world.

7. Tahlilan as a Mechanism for Strengthening Social Solidarity in Madura: A Durkheimian Perspective

In the context of Emile Durkheim's theory of social solidarity, *tahlilan* in Madura can be understood as a collective ritual that reinforces social cohesion within the community. Durkheim distinguished between two types of social solidarity: mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity occurs in societies where individuals are bound together by shared values, beliefs, and traditions. This sense of shared identity is deeply rooted in collective practices such as *tahlilan*, which is a key Islamic tradition in Madura. In this sense, *tahlilan* exemplifies mechanical solidarity, as the ritual unites the community by fostering collective engagement and reinforcing social bonds (Hidayaturrahman 2018).

The ritual of *tahlilan* encompasses key elements that Durkheim considered essential for maintaining mechanical solidarity. These include shared religious beliefs, communal recitations of prayers and *zikir* (remembrance of God), and active participation from all social strata—ranging from lower to upper classes. During these gatherings, individuals are not merely participants in a religious event, but they also embody the collective spirit of the community, sharing in spiritual values that transcend personal identity. Through *tahlilan*, social ties are strengthened, and a sense

of unity is fostered among community members. The ritual serves as a reminder that they are part of a larger whole, bound by common spiritual and social responsibilities (Fajariyah 2020).

Beyond reinforcing social cohesion, *tahlilan* functions as a mechanism for coping with grief and the uncertainties that follow death. Durkheim argued that religious rituals play a crucial role in helping communities manage collective emotions and reaffirm social norms. In the case of *tahlilan*, gathering to pray for the deceased offers the community a sense of comfort and continuity, as they engage in a shared tradition that provides meaning in the face of loss. The act of coming together to support grieving families reinforces social ties and ensures that the community remains cohesive, even in times of hardship. This aligns with Durkheim's view that religion acts as a social glue, integrating individuals into the wider community (Astutik and Sarmini 2014).

From Durkheim's perspective, *tahlilan* is more than just a religious ritual—it is a critical social tool for preserving and reinforcing mechanical solidarity within the Madurese community. The practice helps maintain social unity by renewing and strengthening shared values while also serving as a channel for collective emotional expression during significant life events, such as death. By sustaining this tradition, the people of Madura effectively safeguard their social cohesion, making *tahlilan* a vital component of their social and cultural structure (Fajariyah 2020).

Moreover, in the modern era, societal changes and evolving social systems have led to a shifting perception of cultural practices among younger generations. Many younger individuals express less interest in participating in traditional activities like *tahlilan*, viewing them as outdated or irrelevant. This disconnect between the older and younger generations highlights the broader societal challenge of preserving cultural heritage in the face of modernization and individualism. As *tahlilan* is rich in social significance, fostering a deeper understanding of its value can help bridge

this generational gap and reintegrate younger individuals into the cultural fold (Darmawan and Marlin 2021).

Utilizing Durkheim's theory of solidarity, this study seeks to examine the cultural phenomenon of *tahlilan* in Madura as an ongoing process of social interaction and cultural expression. The researcher argues that the *tahlilan* tradition is deeply intertwined with two fundamental elements: theological doctrine and social-humanist values. These elements provide the framework for understanding how *tahlilan* functions not only as a religious practice but also as a means of promoting social solidarity and mutual support within the community (Salik 2019).

In Durkheim's view, religious phenomena often arise from the interplay between social and religious interests. Religion cannot be separated from social life, and social life, in turn, is shaped by religious practices. In the case of *tahlilan*, the social significance of the ritual is tied to both its religious meaning and its role in fostering interdependence and cooperation within the community. By understanding *tahlilan* through the lens of Durkheim's theory, this study aims to describe how this cultural practice contributes to the broader framework of social life in Madura, preserving social harmony and continuity (Santoso and Khisbiyah 2021).

D. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *tahlilan* in Madura represents more than just a religious ritual; it serves as a critical social institution that reinforces communal solidarity, cultural identity, and religious harmony. The practice integrates both Islamic values and local traditions, creating a unique social framework where individuals from all social strata come together to support one another, especially during times of grief. This blending of religion and culture has made *tahlilan* a key mechanism for preserving the collective identity of the Madurese people and maintaining social cohesion across generations. However, the research reveals certain challenges within

the practice of *tahlilan*, particularly related to the financial strain it places on families in rural communities. Many participants, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, face pressure to perform the ritual despite limited resources, sometimes relying on loans from neighbors to cover costs. This economic burden indicates a tension between cultural expectations and financial realities, which requires further exploration.

The limitations of this research lie in its focus on a single geographical area, which may not fully capture variations in the practice of *tahlilan* across different regions of Madura. Additionally, the study primarily centers on the ritual's social and cultural significance, leaving gaps in understanding how generational changes or external influences, such as modernization, may impact the sustainability of *tahlilan* over time. Future research should aim to expand the scope to include other regions of Madura and explore how younger generations perceive and engage with *tahlilan*. Further studies could also investigate the economic implications of the tradition and potential reforms to make the practice more accessible to all community members without compromising its cultural and religious significance.

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