



Tabut in Bengkulu: Comparative Perspectives of KKT and KETAB on Origins, Rituals, and Culturalization

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Abstract

The Tabut tradition in Bengkulu is a cultural heritage with strong historical, social, and religious values. This tradition is divided into two main groups: Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT) and Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB). These two groups exhibit differences in the practice and meaning of traditions, making comparative study particularly interesting. This study aims to analyze the differences and similarities between KKT and KETAB in the implementation of the Tabut Tradition in Bengkulu. This study uses a qualitative method with a comparative study approach. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with KKT and KETAB leaders, direct observation of the implementation of the Tabut Tradition, and related literature studies. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and analytical techniques to understand the differences and similarities between the two groups. The results of the study show that, although KKT emphasizes more religious and ritual aspects in the Tabut Tradition, KETAB is more oriented towards cultural and tourism aspects; both, however, still play a role in preserving traditions. Additionally, it was found that the difference in meaning did not hinder social harmony between the two groups during the annual implementation of the Ark event. The difference in orientation between KKT and KETAB shows the flexibility of the Tabut Tradition in adapting to changing times. Both groups play an essential role in preserving this tradition, both in terms of religion.

Keywords: Tabut Tradition, Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT), Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB), History, Values

Introduction

The Tabut tradition is a significant cultural and religious practice in Bengkulu, Indonesia, observed annually from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussain ibn Ali in the Battle of Karbala (Muharral & Misbah, 2022, pp. 45–46). Initially rooted in Shi'a mourning traditions, the term "Tabut" derives from the Arabic word for "wooden box" or "chest," symbolizing the grave of Imam Hussein. Historically, this tradition was practiced in various coastal areas of Sumatra, such as Aceh, Padang, and Pariaman (Zhafira, 2021, p. 1). However, it has significantly declined, leaving Bengkulu and Padang (where it is called Tabuik) as the only regions where it continues. Over time, the religious essence of the tradition has evolved, with the Tabut festival transforming into a significant cultural attraction that garners both local and international interest (Baparekraf RI, 2024). Despite its recognition as an integral part of Bengkulu's identity, many community members remain unaware of its more profound historical and ritual significance. The preservation of this tradition has been primarily undertaken by Keluarga Tabut, a community historically responsible for its execution. However, differing perspectives on its history and rituals have led to the division of Keluarga Tabut into two distinct

groups: Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT) and Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB), each of which plays a crucial role in maintaining and interpreting the tradition in unique ways. Given the lack of previous research on this subject, this study is essential in exploring the differences between KKT and KETAB regarding their perspectives on the Tabut tradition.

Scholarly discussions on the Tabut tradition have primarily focused on its origins, meanings, and transformations over time. Previous studies highlight the migration of Shi'a from South India to Bengkulu during British colonial rule, bringing the Tabut ritual with them. Theoretical frameworks such as phenomenology and comparative historical analysis provide valuable insights into how traditions evolve within socio-religious contexts. The phenomenological approach emphasizes understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of the practitioners, making it particularly relevant for analyzing the differing perspectives of KKT and KETAB. While KKT maintains a firm adherence to the sacred and ritualistic aspects of the Tabut (Hadi, Asrori, & Rusman, 2021, pp. 22–23), KETAB focuses on its cultural and artistic expressions. A comparative analysis of these organizations enables a deeper understanding of how religious traditions evolve and the extent to which cultural forces influence their contemporary expressions. Additionally, historical sources and ethnographic accounts provide essential data on the evolution of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu and the role of Keluarga Tabut in preserving its legacy.

Based on these considerations, this study formulates the following research questions: What is the nature of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu? How did the tradition emerge and develop in the region? How do KKT and KETAB interpret and practice the tradition in contemporary times? To address these questions, this research aims to explain the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu, analyze its historical development, and compare the perspectives of KKT and KETAB regarding its meaning and execution. By examining the differences and similarities between these two organizations, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the intersection of religious rituals and cultural adaptation. Furthermore, the findings will offer insights into the evolving identity of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu and its significance within both local and national contexts.

This research hypothesizes that the divergence between KKT and KETAB stems from differing views on the sacredness and cultural adaptability of the Tabut tradition. While KKT is likely to emphasize ritual purity and religious significance, KETAB may focus on its artistic and heritage value as a means of cultural preservation. This study aims to explore how historical narratives, communal identities, and governmental policies shape the transformation of religious traditions into cultural festivals. Through an in-depth comparative analysis of these organizations, this research will shed light on the complex dynamics of spiritual and cultural heritage in Bengkulu, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how traditions persist and evolve in contemporary society.

Literature Review

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu, focusing on the comparative perspectives of Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT) and Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB). Qualitative research is chosen as it enables an in-depth exploration of the social, historical, and theological aspects of the tradition through direct engagement with cultural practitioners, historical records, and community perceptions. The study follows a postpositivist approach, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument, collecting data through purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Hadi, Asrori, & Rusman, 2021, pp. 22–

23). Data collection is conducted through field studies involving observation, interviews, and documentation. Primary data sources include direct interactions with experts, community leaders, and descendants involved in the Tabut tradition, as well as participation in processions and rituals held in Bengkulu City. Secondary data is obtained from books, journals, theses, and official documents that provide historical and cultural insights into the tradition. Observations focus on key locations such as the Tabut procession areas and community settlements, where researchers examine ritual practices and community engagement. Interviews are conducted with members of both KKT and KETAB to explore their respective interpretations of the tradition, the sacred values upheld by KKT, and the cultural emphasis of KETAB. Additionally, sources such as "Upacara Tradisional Daerah Bengkulu" and "Tabot Jejak Cinta Keluarga Nabi di Bengkulu" provide crucial historical documentation and interpretations of the tradition's origins and significance.

For data presentation and analysis, the study employs descriptive, comparative, and thematic analysis methods. The descriptive method is utilized to organize and present data systematically, offering a comprehensive overview of the Tabut tradition, including its historical background, ceremonies, and symbolic meanings. A phenomenological and historical approach is employed to trace the origins of Tabut, identify the key figures involved in its preservation, and examine its evolving significance within the community. Comparative analysis is used to identify distinctions between KKT and KETAB in terms of ritual practices, historical narratives, and cultural adaptations. Thematic analysis categorizes findings into key themes, such as ritual elements, symbolic representations, and organizational roles, that maintain the tradition. Additionally, discourse analysis is employed to examine perspectives from religious leaders, government authorities, and community members regarding the transformation and contemporary relevance of Tabut. By systematically interpreting qualitative data, this study aims to illuminate the complex interplay between religious devotion and cultural expression within the Tabut tradition, providing a nuanced understanding of how KKT and KETAB contribute to its preservation and adaptation in Bengkulu society.

Results and Discussion

The Tabut tradition in Bengkulu is a deeply embedded cultural and religious practice that has undergone significant transformation over time. It has merged with local customs, evolving into a unique artistic expression that reflects both the social and spiritual identity of the Bengkulu community. While the core elements of mourning and reverence for Husain remain central, the tradition has evolved into a significant annual festival that attracts national and international interest. This evolution demonstrates the adaptability of cultural traditions, blending historical and spiritual aspects with contemporary artistic practices. However, debates continue regarding the tradition's authenticity and origins, particularly whether it was brought by Indian immigrants or emerged locally during the colonial period.

The preservation of the Tabut tradition is upheld mainly by *Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut* (KKT), a community of descendants responsible for maintaining its rituals and ceremonies. KKT ensures the continuity of sacred values through key stages of the procession, including *Ngambik Tanah* (taking the soil), *Duduk Penja* (washing the sacred fingers), and *Arak Serban* (parading the turban), culminating in *Tabut Tebuang* (disposal of the Tabut). These stages symbolize the mourning process for Husain ibn Ali and are performed with deep reverence by the Tabut families. However, the emergence of a more tourist-oriented adaptation, known as *Tabut Pembangunan*, has sparked

tensions between traditionalists and those advocating for cultural modernization. The shift from a purely religious ritual to a broader cultural celebration raises concerns about the impact of commercialization on the historical and religious authenticity of the tradition (Handayani, 2013, pp. 245–246).

The division between Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT) and Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB) highlights the complexities of cultural heritage preservation. KKT prioritizes the sacred and hereditary aspects of the Tabut tradition, whereas KETAB advocates for a more flexible and inclusive approach, integrating the tradition into cultural tourism. Under the leadership of figures like Idramsyah Taher, KETAB challenges the notion that the Tabut tradition was imported from India, instead emphasizing its local development following the construction of Fort Marlborough. This divergence in historical narratives reflects broader discussions on cultural ownership, authenticity, and the impact of colonial and external influences on indigenous traditions. The contrast between KKT's traditionalist stance and KETAB's reformist perspective illustrates how differing interpretations of history can lead to fragmentation in heritage preservation efforts.

Despite these differences, the Tabut tradition remains a fundamental element of Bengkulu's cultural identity, embodying both religious devotion and communal unity. The annual festival serves as a unifying force, bringing together diverse social groups while reinforcing historical continuity. However, the debate between traditionalists and reformists underscores the challenges of maintaining authenticity while adapting cultural practices to contemporary contexts. As Bengkulu navigates modernization and tourism development, the sustainability of the Tabut tradition will likely depend on striking a balance between its religious significance and cultural innovation and inclusivity. A nuanced understanding of these dynamics is crucial to preserving the integrity of the tradition while ensuring its continued relevance in modern society.

The history of The Introduction of the Tabut Tradition to Bengkulu according to KKT and KETAB

The history of the Tabut tradition's entry into Bengkulu City has sparked numerous debates. Initially, the Tabut Ceremony was a religious ritual performed by workers from Bengal and Madras when they were hired by the East Indian Company (EIC), owned by England, in Bengkulu in the 17th century, to build Fort Marlborough. They were the ones who carried out the Tabut ceremony in Bengkulu to commemorate the death of Husain ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, *Shallallahu 'Alaibi Wa Sallam* (Modul Lokalitas dan Pengetahuan Tradisional, 2021, p. 28).

This story is a history that is widely discussed in the Bengkulu Society today, but what is revealed in the story of the Ark tradition is that it has faced significant rejection from the Ark family. Each of the KKT and KETAB has its views on the history of the entry of the Ark Tradition into Bengkulu, including:

1. The History of Tabut Traditions according to Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT).

The history of the entry of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu, according to Mr. Acmad Syafril, he said that *"the Indians employed by the British did not bring the ark because the workers brought by the British to build the Marlborough fort were prisoners who were always restrained in handcuffs so that they couldn't practice or even introduce the Tabut tradition to the people of Bengkulu."* (A. Syafril Syahboeddin, personal communication, May 2024) However, the history of the Tabut ceremony, as the members of Keluarga Tabut believe, is that the Tabut tradition originated and was introduced

to areas visited by people from the Arabian Peninsula. During a specific period, the Tabut tradition arrived in and entered the Punjab area of India. Then, from Punjab, this Tabut tradition was brought to Bengkulu. However, before arriving in Bengkulu, these Indians had already arrived in Aceh. However, because they did not receive a good response, they left Aceh and sailed again, landing in Bengkulu in 1336 AD (Dahri, 2016, pp. 83–84).

The Indians who arrived in Bengkulu were not only to introduce the Tabut tradition to the Bengkulu Community but also to broadcast Islam to the archipelago. They arrived at Bandar Sungai Serut, Bengkulu, on January 5, 1336 AD / 18 Jumadil Awwal 736 H., led by Imam Maulana Ichsad, descendant of Ali Zainal Abidin ibn Al-Husain ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib. They numbered 13 people among its members who were known to be Syech Abdurrahman (*Ampar Batu*), who died on Thursday, April 12, 1336, AD, and Zalmiyah (*Kramat Gadis*) died on Saturday, 24 Ramadan 737 H. Imam Maulana Ichsad returned to Makkah, Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Syech Abdurrahman (*Ampar Batu*) and Zalmiyah (*Kramat Gadis*) were buried in Karabela, Bengkulu (Hariadi & Arios, 2018, pp. 43–44).

They were the first to carry out and celebrate the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu. It's just that Imam Maulana Ichsad and his entourage did not stay long in Bengkulu, as they eventually returned to Punjab. After Imam Maulana Ichsad returned to Punjab, Sheikh Burhanuddin, better known as Imam Senggolo, appeared. There is no official document stating when Imam Senggolo arrived in Bengkulu. Still, it can be estimated that Imam Senggolo's arrival was not far from Imam Maulana Ichsad's entourage's arrival in Bengkulu. But it is known that Imam Senggolo lived and settled in Bengkulu and was buried in Karabela, Bengkulu (Dahri, 2016, pp. 83–84).

2. The History of Tabut Traditions according to Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB).

According to Mr. Idramsyah Taher, the chairman of Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB), the history of the Tabut tradition's entry in Bengkulu differs from what was conveyed by Mr. Acmad Syafril. Mr. Idramsyah explained that the beginning of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu dates back to the time of the construction of the Marlborough Fort, and the Tabut tradition originated from Bengkulu, not India, Persia, or Punjab.

The inauguration of Fort Marlborough marked the beginning of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu. After the completion of the construction of Fort Marlborough, an inauguration ceremony was held, attended by the Queen of England, accompanied by a colossal drama performance that retold the story of Hasan and Husain's resistance in the Karbala war against Yazid ibn Muawiyah on a large stage. After the staging, because the story was beautifully displayed and attracted the community's attention, it became part of the Bengkulu culture, just like the puppet show staged by Sunan Kalijaga (Idramsyah Taher, personal communication, May 2024).

The Meaning of the Tabut Tradition for KKT and KETAB

The Tabut tradition is a ritual that requires religious values at the beginning, which later transformed into a cultural ritual that has an essential meaning for the people of Bengkulu, especially for the community that plays a role in preserving it and is directly involved in each of its implementations, namely *Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut* (KKT) and *Kerukunan Tabut Budaya* (KETAB). Both have the same role in preserving the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu. Still, regarding the meaning

of the Tabut tradition, *Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut* (KKT) and *Kerukunan Tabut Budaya* (KETAB) have differences.

The Meaning of the Tabut Tradition for Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT)

a. A Symbol of Resistance to Injustice is Full of Symbolic Meaning in Each Ritual.

The Tabut is a form of commemoration of Ashura that is closely tied to Shi'a rituals. It involves a coffin that presents the coffin of Husain (Asril, 2013, p. 311). Who was killed in the Karbala Field as a result of the war against the forces of Yazid ibn Muawwiyah? The rejection of Yazid's government became the trigger for Husain's battle, with an army of no more than 100 men cornered and surrounded by a large force of Yazid's army, totaling nearly 4000 troops. The Karbala War became a symbol of the resistance against the injustice of Yazid ibn Muawwiyah and the effort to return the election of the caliph to the Muslims (Muharral & Misbah, 2022, pp. 45–46). Not only as a tradition, the Tabut for the people of Bengkulu is an expression of love for the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, *Shallallahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam*, Husain ibn Ali, who was killed in Padang Karbala. This also means that Bengkulu is one of the places that glorifies the descendants of the Prophet (Widanita, 2021, p. 47).

b. Ancestral Heritage and Identity of the Family.

The Tabut tradition in Bengkulu embodies a significant cultural and ancestral heritage upheld by the Keluarga Tabut. Its preservation extends beyond mere custom, emphasizing sacred values that reinforce familial identity (Handayani, 2013, p. 249). This tradition functions as both a moral commitment and a means of continuous self-improvement for its practitioners. Structurally, it comprises two key aspects: ritual and non-ritual. The ritual element, exclusively performed by the Tabut family under the guidance of the Tabut Shaman, adheres to strict spiritual norms. In contrast, the non-ritual aspect is inclusive, engaging the broader community. The tradition manifests in two primary forms: first, as a sacred annual rite from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram, consisting of ritual processions; second, as physical Tabut structures, intricately crafted to symbolize its spiritual and historical significance. These structures are reserved for the Tabut Ritual Procession. Ultimately, the Tabut tradition functions not only as a religious and historical practice but also as a means of fostering communal and familial cohesion (Zubaedi, 2008, p. 53).

The Meaning of the Tabut Tradition for Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB)

a. Traditions and Original Culture of Bengkulu.

The Tabut tradition, in general, is a form of condolence that incorporates a theatrical performance, telling the story of the Karbala war through the drama of Husain's suffering. How the suffering of thirsty children, because they were besieged in the middle of the hot Desert of Karbala with access to the water source, was closed, and how cruel Yazid was, who had the heart to kill and torture Husain and his followers (Widanita, 2021, p. 49). The Tabut tradition is similar to the Ashura celebration observed by people in Java, who use the Javanese calendar system. This system was later modified to align with the month of Muharram.

The Tabut tradition is the result of cultural acculturation. With all the processions and accessories that accompany it, the Tabut tradition has become an integral part of the artistic heritage of the people of Bengkulu. Although some parties claim that the Tabut tradition is a custom of the Bengali people who were brought to Bengkulu by the British during the

construction of Fort Marlborough, the Tabut tradition has come into contact with local cultures in the course of its development. The Tabut tradition is observed every year by the people of Bengkulu. This makes the Tabut a product of local culture. Even some historians have helped the Tabut tradition as a traditional ceremony for the Bengkulu Malay community (Zubaedi, 2008, pp. 56–57).

b. Culture of Togetherness of the People of Bengkulu.

Implementing the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu reflects togetherness in the social community. Not only does *Keluarga Tabut* contribute, but the community also participates in it, as evidenced by the three-day *Meradai* procession, in which children themselves carry musical instruments around Bengkulu City to collect funds from residents' homes. The community provides funds, food, or other donations during this procession.

The Tabut has fostered togetherness in the Bengkulu community not only in recent decades but also since its inception, and it has become a symbol of unity among the people of Bengkulu. This was also said by Mr. Idamsyah, the Chairman of the Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB), that when the Tabut was first held, people from the Tabut family invited the Chinese people around Marlborough Fort to participate in celebrating the Tabut tradition, and from there was created the so-called "*ikan-ikan* and *telong-telong*" at this time in the Tabut tradition. Chinese people and the Tabut family invite Hindus to Bengkulu, as evidenced by the current forms of Tabut buildings that resemble "*pagodas*." (Idamsyah Taher, personal communication, May 2024)

The Importance of the Tabut Tradition, according to KKT and KETAB

The Tabut tradition is a mandate and cultural heritage maintained and preserved by *Keluarga Tabut* communities, *Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut* (KKT), and *Kerukunan Tabut Budaya* (KETAB) to preserve the historical, religious, and social values of the Bengkulu community.

However, the two have different views of the urgency of the Tabut tradition of *Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut* (KKT) and *Kerukunan Tabut Budaya* (KETAB) in terms of cultural preservation, strengthening the Tabut family's identity, and forming social solidarity.

1. The urgency of the Tabut tradition, according to Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT)

a. Safeguarding Sacred Values

The implementation of the Tabut tradition serves multiple purposes, primarily preserving the sacred values established by the ancestors of the Tabut family, particularly those associated with the ceremonial procession. The Tabut Family, particularly through *Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut* (KKT), plays a crucial role in safeguarding these values. In 2005, KKT demonstrated its commitment to this preservation by constructing central sacred sites at key locations, such as Tapak Paderi near Fort Marlborough, to facilitate the "*ngambik tanah*" procession (Nirmala & Salam, 2024, p. 27611). Additionally, the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu reinforces the Tabut family's identity and social cohesion by upholding ancestral customs. The formation of KKT in 1990 further institutionalized efforts to sustain the Tabut tradition, ensuring its continued existence (Butsainah, 2022, pp. 49–50).

b. Carrying out the mandate of ancestors

The Tabut family's responsibility for every Tabut ceremony in Bengkulu is not just ordinary but their will, namely that of the Tabut family's predecessors. They have the will to preserve and perpetuate the Tabut tradition (Handayani, 2013, pp. 245–246).

In the effort to continue the Tabut tradition, the Tabut family also believes that disasters will occur if they do not perform the Tabut ritual every year. These disasters can take the form of diseases that are difficult to cure and increasingly challenging crops. It was recorded in the case of a smallpox outbreak in the city of Bengkulu in 1950, where the community considered that this outbreak occurred as a result of not carrying out the Tabut ritual in Bengkulu, and therefore, many of the people of Bengkulu thought that the Tabut tradition should be carried out every year (Albayani, 2023, p. 3).

2. The urgency of the Tabut tradition according to the Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB)

a. Become a unifying container

The implementation of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu fosters religious harmony both within and beyond the community by promoting brotherhood through togetherness and social interaction. It facilitates mutual understanding across different social, spiritual, and cultural groups, as reflected in the participation of religious leaders in the annual opening and closing ceremonies (Zubaedi, 2008, pp. 57–61). Beyond social cohesion, the tradition also serves as an economic catalyst, functioning as a form of "City Branding" that attracts national and international tourists. Recognizing its tourism potential, the government has integrated the tradition into a cultural festival to strengthen Bengkulu's identity (Saputra, 2021, p. 5). Additionally, the Tabut has become a cultural driving force, mobilizing both governmental and non-governmental entities, including artists, dancers, Malay orchestras, and artisans, who use it as a platform to showcase Bengkulu's heritage and artistic talent, particularly during the festival's final nights (Nuraini, 2007, pp. 54–56).

b. Preserving Bengkulu culture

The Tabut tradition in Bengkulu is a product of cultural acculturation, originating as a religious practice—some sources suggest it was influenced by the Shi'a spiritual tradition—before merging with local customs to form a distinct cultural expression. However, Idramsyah, the chairman of *Kerukunan Tabut Budaya* (KETAB), refutes this claim, asserting that the tradition is indigenous to Bengkulu and originated from a grand theatrical performance at the inauguration of Fort Marlborough, depicting the Battle of Karbala. This narrative resonated deeply with the people of Bengkulu, leading to its annual reenactment and ultimately establishing it as a cultural tradition (Idramsyah Taher, personal communication, May 2024).

Beyond being a unique cultural heritage of Bengkulu, the Tabut tradition reflects the community's values, emphasizing simplicity, social cohesion, and the integration of religious teachings (Effendi, personal communication, May 2024). Furthermore, its continued practice symbolizes the people's reverence for the family of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and their collective mourning for Husain ibn Ali's martyrdom at Karbala. Simultaneously, it serves as a source of pride for both the Bengkulu community and the Tabut family (Nuraini, 2007, pp. 48–49).

Similarities and Differences in the Meaning and Urgency of the Tabut Tradition according to KKT and KETAB

To facilitate readers' understanding of the researcher's explanations in this paper, a table will be created comparing the meaning and urgency of the Tabut tradition between *Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut* (KKT) and *Kerukunan Tabut Budaya* (KETAB). Here is the table:

No	Topic	KKT	KETAB
1	History	Mr. Syiafril, the chairman of the KKT, stated that Indian workers in Fort Marlborough did not introduce the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu because the workers there were prisoners chained by the British, making it impossible to carry out the Tabut ritual. However, Imam Senggolo and his entourage from India introduced the Tabut tradition to the people of Bengkulu, and this tradition has been continued by his descendants to this day, known as the Tabut family.	Different from what was conveyed by Mr. Acmad Syiafril. Mr. Idramsyah explained that the beginning of the emergence of the first Tabut tradition in Bengkulu, from the time of the construction of the Marlborough Fort and its inauguration, marked the starting point of the Tabut tradition in Bengkulu. After the completion of the construction of Fort Marlborough, an inauguration ceremony was held, attended by the Queen of England, accompanied by a colossal drama performance that retold the story of Hasan and Hussein's resistance in the Karbala war against Yazid ibn Muawiyah on a large stage. After the staging, because the story was beautifully displayed and attracted the community's attention, it eventually became a part of the culture in Bengkulu (Idramsyah Taher, personal communication, May 2024).

2	Ritual	Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT) considers ritual the most essential part of the Tabut procession ceremony because it contains sacred values that each Tabut family must carry out in the Tabut Procession every year (A. Syiafril Syahboeddin, personal communication, May 2024).	Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB) considers that rituals do not need to be shown to the public; they are carried out by the people only, with the Tabut, which is no longer a religious ritual (Idramsyah Taher, personal communication, May 2024).
3	Culture	Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT) considers the cultural practices of the Tabut tradition symbolic of its sacred values.	Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB) considers cultural practices in the Tabut tradition an effort to preserve the culture that is the pride of the Bengkulu people and a means of creating harmony in the Bengkulu community, because the Tabut tradition is also a cultural stage for the people of Bengkulu and not only for certain religions or groups. ¹

Conclusion

The Tabut tradition in Bengkulu is a ceremonial procession commemorating the martyrdom of Husain ibn Ali in the Battle of Karbala, symbolizing resistance to injustice and the efforts of Shi'a leaders in collecting and burying his remains. The origins of the tradition in Bengkulu remain debated, with some attributing its introduction to Indian workers brought by the British. In contrast, others assert that Imam Senggolo and his followers introduced it, or that it is an indigenous cultural tradition of Bengkulu.

The Tabut tradition embodies Islamic values and a spirit of communal unity, extending beyond any specific religious group to become a shared cultural practice among the people of Bengkulu. Central to its continuation is the Tabut family, descendants of the original bearers of the tradition, who historically settled along the Bengkulu coast. Over time, the Kerukunan Keluarga Tabut (KKT) emerged to unite the heirs of Tabut. However, internal differences regarding the interpretation of the tradition led to the formation of Kerukunan Tabut Budaya (KETAB) in 2016.

¹ Idramsyah Taher Ketua KETAB (Keluarga Tabot Budaya).

Divergent perspectives on the tradition persist. KKT maintains that the Tabut was introduced by Imam Senggolo, rejecting the claim that it originated from Indian laborers at Fort Marlborough. In contrast, KETAB associates the tradition's emergence with a theatrical performance about the Karbala War that took place during the fort's inauguration, which eventually became integrated into local culture. Additionally, KKT emphasizes the sacred rituals within the Tabut ceremony, whereas KETAB prioritizes its cultural significance over religious elements.

Despite these differences, both KKT and KETAB contribute to the preservation of the Tabut tradition, ensuring its continued role in enriching the cultural heritage and communal identity of the Bengkulu people.

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