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# Sacred Frankincense and Spiritual Meaning in Sasak Muslim Rituals

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## Abstract

**General background:** Ritual traditions among Sasak Muslims in Lombok reveal a dynamic interaction between Islamic teachings and ancestral heritage. **Specific background:** One of the least discussed yet enduring practices is the use of frankincense, which remains controversial among puritan groups but continues to hold deep spiritual value for local communities. **Knowledge gap:** Previous studies emphasize cultural or syncretic aspects but rarely explore the inner religious experiences and sacred meanings embedded in frankincense use. **Aims:** This study seeks to uncover the sacredness of frankincense in Sasak Muslim rituals using a phenomenological approach, focusing on meaning, symbolism, and spiritual function. **Results:** The findings show that frankincense serves as a medium for purification, a channel for prayer, and a symbolic bridge between humans, ancestors, and the Divine, creating an atmosphere of calmness, reverence, and communal cohesion. **Novelty:** This research offers a new perspective by identifying frankincense as a lived sacred entity within local Islamic spirituality rather than a cultural remnant or superstitious practice. **Implications:** The study enriches scholarship on Nusantara Islam, strengthens frameworks of religious moderation grounded in local wisdom, and highlights the importance of safeguarding intangible spiritual heritage in contemporary Muslim life.

### Highlights:

- Highlights the spiritual meaning and sacred function of frankincense in Sasak Muslim rituals.
- Reveals how ritual symbols shape inner religious experience and communal harmony.
- Offers a new phenomenological perspective on lived Islam in local cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Frankincense, Sasak Muslims, Phenomenology, Ritual Sacredness, Local Islam

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## Introduction

Various traditions and cultures emerge as a diverse reality throughout the regions of Indonesia, 'kejawen' in Java [1], "hajat bumi" in Banten [2] and various other traditions that emerge in Indonesian society are evidence that their significance, existence, and influence have endured for a long time until now ini [3]. Culture complements human life both in relation to the natural environment and their social environment[4]. Therefore, the community needs to adapt so that the emerging culture can survive and become a distinctive characteristic of the society. The phenomenon of burning incense in Sasak Muslim rituals is one expression of religiosity that often occurs in a quiet setting; although it is not widely discussed, the ritual process is still carried out. Amid the dominance of normative Islam, this practice demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between sharia and local tradition[5]. BPS data shows that more than 96% of the population of Lombok are Muslims, yet various studies emphasize that the form of Islam practiced by the Sasak community is accommodative of ancestral heritage[6]

From a phenomenological perspective, as proposed by Schutz[7]. In exploring the meaning experienced by the actor, the subject does not merely assess the practice doctrinally. Schutz emphasizes that human actions can only be understood through the world of lived experience shaped by subjective consciousness and the inner intentions of the actor. Therefore, rituals such as incense burning should not be seen merely as external symbolic acts, but as expressions of religious consciousness containing specific intentions, hopes, and spiritual orientations. Field findings indicate that incense is understood as a means of purifying space, invoking tranquility, and serving as a bridge to the spiritual dimension. This concept aligns with the view [8] about hierophany, the emergence of the sacred through ritual symbols.

The incense burning ritual is still considered a means to cleanse a house or certain area from disturbances by spirits, and it can also be used as a mosque fragrance. It is acknowledged that Lombok is famous as the island of a thousand mosques, and upon investigation, this title indeed matches the existing facts. According to the records of Taufan Hidjaz, a lecturer from the National Institute of Technology, there are 3,767 large mosques and 5,184 small mosques spread across 518 villages on the island of Lombok[9]. The large number of existing mosques does not diminish this tradition, which is still maintained. This creates a peaceful atmosphere during worship, thanks to the fragrant aroma they emit.

Based on the results of initial observations in several areas considered still deeply rooted in the tradition of using incense in performing religious and cultural rituals, such as Sempong Hamlet, Selebung Ketangga Village, Keruak District, and Sagik Mateng Hamlet, Pene Village, Jerowaru District, Sukarara, West Sakra District. In general, there are several aspects that are interesting to examine further. First, the use of incense reflects social, cleanliness, honor, and spiritual values, creating a strong bond between local traditions, social awareness, social sensitivity, and community spirituality. Second, it highlights the extent of local traditions and wisdom that remain closely related to cultural heritage and harmony in religious practices. Third, the social and environmental impacts can help develop guidelines or principles that support responsible and sustainable religious practices in community life[10]. The gap between the practice of Islamic teachings and the culture that has been traditionalized will become the common thread in the discussion.

Other notable phenomena include the inability of early religious teachers to fully Islamize the Sasak community in remote regions, reflecting the intricate process of adaptation and integration between new faiths and existing traditions. When Islam first arrived in Lombok, its teachings had to adjust to the deeply rooted local culture. This encounter resulted in a form of syncretism, where Islamic principles merged with indigenous customs. For instance, the continued use of incense and resin in religious rituals—practices not originally prescribed in Islam—persisted as they had become integral to local traditions. Religious leaders such as *kyai* and *tuan guru* in Lombok played a crucial role in harmonizing Islamic teachings with cultural practices. They attempted to reconcile local customs with Islamic values to prevent doctrinal conflict. Nonetheless, this accommodation sometimes sparked tensions between more orthodox groups and those more tolerant of traditional influences.

The harmonization of spirituality and the attitude of prioritizing religious values, as well as the gap between tradition and Islamic teachings, have led this research to focus on the strategic role of frankincense in the religious traditions of the Sasak Muslim community. Why frankincense continues to be a part of the religious traditions of the Sasak Muslim community and how the religious traditions of the Sasak Muslims influence interfaith harmony. The research aims are to analyze and map the strategic role of frankincense in the religious traditions of the Sasak Muslim community, to analyze and describe frankincense as part of the religious traditions of the Sasak Muslims, and to explore the implications of the religious traditions of the Sasak Muslim community on social piety, social sensitivity, and tolerance among religious communities.

## Theoretical Studies

A number of studies on the traditional rituals of the Sasak Muslim community have been conducted by anthropologists and religious scholars. For example, Zuhdi discusses the harmony between Islam and tradition in the Wetu Telu community in Lombok. [6] Meanwhile, Bowen examines the dynamics of rituals and religious discourse in Indonesian Muslim communities[5]. Other studies, such as Beatty's, highlight the role of emotions and symbols in Javanese rituals.

The Fragrance of Incense on the Island of a Thousand Mosques: Contestation, Integration, and Resolution, this research was conducted by Suprpto and Amrullah[11]. The results of this study present interactions across groups, ethnicities, and religions that are clearly distinct. Social interaction can result in harmonious growth and facilitate the process of integration; however, it can also lead to conflicts and misunderstandings among communities. Issues that are not proportionally designed can escalate into riots. Consequently, the balance between local wisdom and the lack of public

spaces in society begins to fade. This leads to various consequences, such as personal conflicts escalating into group conflicts, and even disputes between ethnic and religious groups. Understanding religious literacy can enhance social harmony among people from different backgrounds, as religion plays an important role in conflict resolution, particularly in the de-escalation phase of conflict resolution. Research on the Sufism Values in the Religious Traditions of the Aboge Community aims to understand how tradition and Islamic law are practiced. This tradition is not only limited to ancestral heritage, but also encompasses noble values. It involves three related aspects: first, the relationship between humans and nature; second, the relationship between humans and each other; and third, the relationship between humans and the Creator. In other words, the religious traditions of the Aboge community in Mudal Village are deeply imbued with Sufi values. [12]

Research conducted by Suparman Jayadi on the Social Interaction of Hindus and Muslims in Religious Ceremonies and the Topat War Tradition in Lombok aims to analyze the social interaction between Hindus and Muslims in the topat war tradition in Lingsar Village, Lingsar District, West Lombok. The research results explain that Hindus and Muslims believe in the nggilahang kaoq ritual and the topat war tradition as a cultural heritage of their ancestors to be carried out together in a series of topat war traditions. These ritual activities are a form of rational and irrational interaction between Hindus and Muslims or a relationship of tolerance among adherents of different religions within the Topat War tradition. [13] Most of these studies are descriptive-cultural in nature, focusing on acculturation and syncretism, without touching on the inner experience (lived religion) of ritual practitioners, especially regarding the sacredness of incense. Theological analysis also tends to assess these practices normatively rather than phenomenologically. In fact, the theory of the anthropology of religion mentioned by Émile Durkheim in "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life" explains that religion is a reflection of social structures and functions to integrate society[14]. In relation to this, this theory of the anthropology of religion is relevant for understanding incense as an element in the belief system of the Sasak Muslim community, and how these elements contribute to individual and collective religious experiences. Therefore, the research to be conducted can highlight the implications of Sasak Muslim religious traditions on social interactions and attitudes of tolerance among people of different faiths.

Previous studies on the religious traditions of the Sasak people generally only highlighted cultural aspects, acculturation, or theological controversies, without exploring the depth of meaning experienced by the ritual participants. This is explained in the theory regarding the correlation between culture, society, and spiritual aspects. This concept was proposed by Kienzle in "Man and His Symbols".[15] As a result, practices such as the use of incense are often reduced to mere cultural remnants or considered a deviation from Islamic teachings. This article aims to address this gap by using a phenomenological approach, which allows for an understanding of the inner meaning and religious experiences hidden behind the incense ritual.

Within this framework, this study has three specific objectives: First, to reveal the sacred meaning of incense as understood and experienced by the Sasak Muslim community. Second, to analyze the symbols and functions of incense in building relationships between humans, ancestors, and God. This research is closely related to the theory used by Mircea Eliade in his book "The Sacred and the Profane." Eliade states that in every religious tradition, there are sacred symbols that reflect a connection with the Divine. [8] Third, interpreting the role of incense in shaping harmony between Islamic teachings and local traditions as a form of living Islam in Lombok.

## Method

This research uses a phenomenological approach [16], to explore the sacred meaning of incense in the religious consciousness of the Sasak Muslim community. This method seeks to understand the lived experience, rather than merely describing the ritual outwardly. In the phenomenological tradition of Schutz and Moustakas, the researcher performs epoche, which is the suspension of theological or cultural assumptions in order to authentically listen to the subject's narrative. Data collection is carried out through participant observation in selamatan and roah rituals, in-depth interviews with traditional figures and ritual practitioners, as well as documentation of ritual symbols. [7] The subjects in this study are traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community members in several areas that are the objects of the research, such as Semping Hamlet in Selebung Village, Keruak District, and Sagik Mateng Hamlet in Pene Village, Jerowaru District, which are areas in East Lombok Regency. On the other hand, this research approach is known as qualitative research; qualitative research is oriented towards natural phenomena and symptoms. Qualitative research is fundamental in nature and is conducted in the field (field research). [17]

In this study, the researcher will interact more with selected sources, including participating in traditional events and the burning of incense and frankincense in customary and religious ceremonies that are held. The data sources in this study are primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected by the researcher from first-hand sources. This data includes observations and interviews with customary leaders, religious leaders, and community members who still practice these traditions. Meanwhile, secondary data refers to data collected by the researcher through books, journals, and other sources related to religious traditions in the community, as well as the use of incense and frankincense in the traditions of the Sasak Muslim community.

To analyze the research data, the researcher used several data collection methods, one of which was participatory observation (observer as participant), where the researcher participates in the religious traditions being carried out. At the same time, non-participatory observation was also used, by directly observing the process of incense burning during the ritual, along with in-depth interviews. The data analysis technique used was qualitative descriptive analysis to analyze and explain the findings of the research, as well as to attempt to integrate the meanings contained within them.

The research stages to be conducted in this study are identifying problems, this stage is carried out through field observations, interviews with religious and customary leaders, and reviewing relevant previous research. Analyzing the problems is done by conducting an analysis of the phenomenon of incense use in the religious traditions of the Sasak Muslim community, through data and information collection, analyzing the root causes, and explaining the implications. Community participation and involvement of social groups in carrying out traditional ceremonies and religious traditions can enhance knowledge, social piety, and tolerant attitudes among religious followers. Strategic planning involves planning appropriate and clear research strategies, which can determine the steps to achieve the research objectives. It also involves researchers in field activities, implementing research programs, and involving customary and community leaders in the execution. Evaluating and reflecting on the level of success in research by measuring the effectiveness of strategies, improving weaknesses, and identifying benefits that can be applied in future research.

## Results and Discussion

### A. The Sacredness of Incense Among the Sasak Muslim Community

This study found that the practice of burning incense in Sasak Muslim rituals is experienced as part of an inner spiritual experience. Through participant observation, it was observed that the incense is lit in a quiet atmosphere, accompanied by the recitation of prayers, dhikr, and intentions to bring calmness and sanctification to the ritual space. From in-depth interviews conducted, ritual practitioners stated that the incense smoke is believed to carry prayers to the spiritual realm and invite blessings as well as the protection of ancestors. Meanwhile, literature studies show that the symbol of smoke in religious rituals is often understood as a sacred manifestation, as explained by [8] with the concept of hierophany. This tradition is not considered idolatry, but as an expression of local Islam that combines sharia and ancestral heritage, in line with the findings of Bowen (1993) and Zuhdi (2018) regarding the religiosity of the Nusantara community.

On one hand, the Sasak Muslim community has its own distinctive characteristics compared to, for example, the Muslim communities of Java, Sunda, Makassar, Minang, Melayu, Arab, and other ethnic groups in the Nusantara. The practice of religious traditions among the Sasak Muslims is certainly quite laden with syncretic religious practices within the framework of Islam Wetu Telu. [18] which is more regarded as a cultural practice rather than a religious practice. The Muslim Sasak religious tradition that is still maintained and even preserved is the zikir syafaah [19] at the home of a grieving family. This tradition is carried out in three stages; first, consecutively from the first night after the funeral ceremony up to the ninth day. After three nights, the nelung tradition is held, on the seventh night the mituq tradition is observed, and on the ninth night the nyiwaq tradition is performed. Second, after forty days from the day of the funeral, the metang dase tradition is carried out. Third, after one hundred days, the nyatus tradition will be held. At each of these stages, Sasak Muslims will host a meal for all family members, neighbors, and friends who are invited at that time, and in the evening, a religious tradition in the form of zikiran (tahlilan) and prayers is conducted by the local religious leaders.

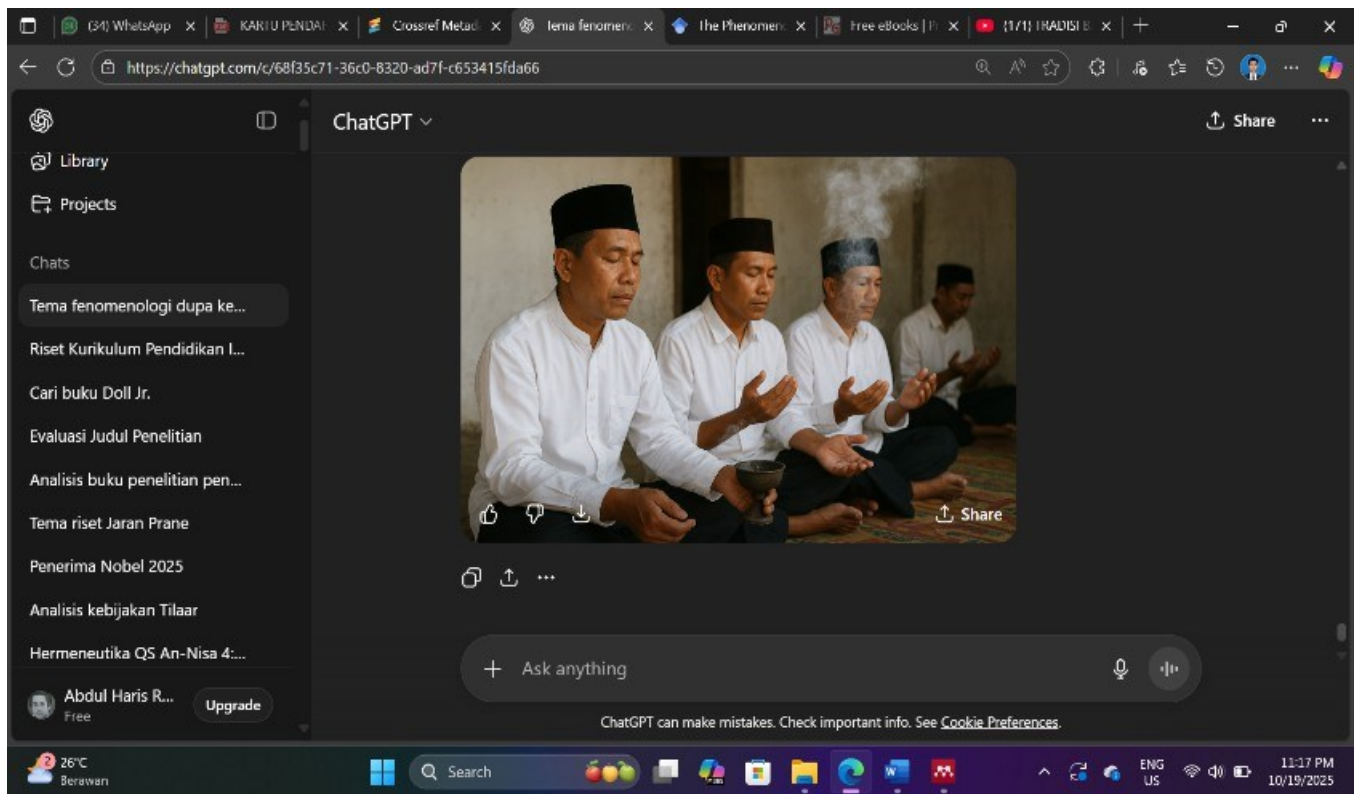
In the tahlilan activities, the community includes incense as a medium. The use of incense is inseparable from the ancestral heritage of the Sasak people in various routines for spiritual purposes, including calling upon the spirits of ancestors, obtaining supernatural knowledge, expelling evil spirits, inviting benevolent supernatural beings, asking for blessings on agricultural and livestock yields, ensuring the safety of babies, healing, and various other purposes. [20]

Incense in the religious traditions of the Sasak community in the research location serves as a very strong bond between the tuan guru as a religious preacher and the leaders and followers of Wetu Telu as the object of the preaching. By accepting incense into their religious traditions, they are able to accept the tuan guru's preaching to gradually practice Sharia Islam perfectly. This strategy has been proven successful by TGH. Muhammad Mutawalli in bringing Wetu Telu followers in several areas of Lombok Island into the true path of Islamic teachings. His skill in interpreting incense provides an understanding of the concept of Ihsan teachings. [21] It earned him great sympathy and respect among the followers and leaders of Wetu Telu, so his words were considered the sacred utterances of a pandita ratu that dared not be contradicted. The smoke from the incense is believed to have the power to cleanse the environment of negative energy or spiritual disturbances. In various traditional ceremonies, incense is burned to drive away evil spirits and purify the place from all forms of spiritual impurities. This practice is carried out before important events to ensure that the place is spiritually clean.

For example, during the night of Nisfu Sya'ban (The mid-night of the month of Sha'ban in the Islamic calendar), the Sasak people burn incense while praying for blessings and protection from God. This practice demonstrates how elements of local tradition are integrated into Islamic religious rituals. Similarly, in various celebrations and traditional ceremonies such as weddings, circumcisions, and housewarming ceremonies, incense is used as part of the ritual procession. Burning incense at these events is believed to bring good fortune and blessings to the participants and to ensure the smoothness and success of the event. The burning of incense is also used by spiritual leaders in Sasak society to communicate with the supernatural world. The smoke produced is considered a medium that can connect the real world with the spiritual world, allowing communication with spirits or supernatural beings believed to have an influence on daily life. [22]

Other findings reveal that burning incense is not merely part of tradition but is understood as a means of opening a spiritual connection between humans and the divine dimension and ancestors. From what was observed, the ritual takes place in solemn silence, participants close their eyes, sit cross-legged, and let the incense smoke rise slowly as if carrying their prayers. From what was heard, recitations of al-Fatihah, salawat, and whispered prayers create a spiritual background that evokes a sacred atmosphere, without cheers or commotion. Meanwhile, from what was read, local texts and records of dhikr indicate a belief that incense is an adornment of prayer—a “guardian” of intentions reaching the spiritual realm[23]. Several

traditional figures refer to it as a “purifier of air” and a “connector of feelings”.



**Figure 1.** The three main dimensions of ritual-performative, symbolic-spiritual, and social-communal

This study found a close connection between three main dimensions, namely the ritual-performative, symbolic-spiritual, and social-communal dimensions. The ritual-performative dimension emerges through the rituals of incense burning, which are bound by time, space, and customary rules, indicating that this act is not a random habit but rather part of local worship practices. The symbolic-spiritual dimension gives meaning to incense smoke as a medium of purification, a conduit for prayer, and a link to the transcendent world. Meanwhile, the social-communal dimension shows that incense practices strengthen solidarity, cultivate a solemn atmosphere, and evoke a collective sense of the presence of the sacred. All three dimensions support each other; without ritual, the symbol loses its form, without the symbol, spirituality loses its language, and without the communal, sacredness loses its living space[24].

The interconnection among ritual, symbol, and spirituality unfolds within the religious life of the Sasak people, where Islamic teachings intertwine with ancestral traditions. During practices such as *roah*, *selamatan*, or *zikr* for the deceased, incense appears not as a mere addition but as an essential element in shaping a sacred atmosphere. Here, the interaction of dimensions becomes clear: rituals determine the flow of actions, symbols express layered meanings, and spirituality animates the inner experience. The quiet ambiance, circular seating, and fragrant smoke of incense cultivate a shared awareness that worship is not only spoken but deeply felt—a genuine *religious feeling*. Within this framework, the Sasak Muslim community achieves a balance between normative Islam and its cultural expressions. This relationship is not abstract or theoretical; it is lived and embodied, transmitted without written texts yet comprehended through emotion and spiritual intuition.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the fields of religion, culture, and local cultural policy. First, from an academic perspective, the research demonstrates that the use of incense should not be viewed merely as a form of magical ritual, but rather as an embodiment of *lived Islam* that reflects deep spiritual experience. Consequently, the appropriate scholarly approach involves strengthening phenomenological and anthropological studies of religion to avoid purely normative interpretations. Second, for religious and cultural leaders, adopting a dialogical method in preaching and education is essential—one that acknowledges the importance of symbols and the community's religious sensibilities. Third, in terms of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, incense practices can serve as valuable material for documentation and intergenerational learning—not to be uncritically sanctified, but to be appreciated as part of a shared spiritual identity. Such an approach fosters religious moderation, respect for local wisdom, and the preservation of spiritual meaning in the midst of modernization.

## B. The Symbol of Incense in Building the Relationship Between Ancestral Humans and God.

Research found that for the Sasak Muslim community, incense serves as a symbol of the presence of the sacred. The smoke of the incense is interpreted as the ascent of prayers to God, while its aroma brings a sense of calm as a purification of the soul. In the context of ancestors, incense is regarded as a form of respect for the spirits, not for worship, but to maintain spiritual ties across generations. Through incense, the community feels connected to the spiritual history of their family and karuhun (ancestors), while also submitting themselves to Allah.

**Table 1.** The Symbol of Incense in Building the Relationship Between Ancestral Humans and God

| Ricoeur's Concept                    | Function in incense rituals                                      |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The symbol contains a double meaning | Smoke is not just a scent, but a prayer                          |
| A symbol that awakens awareness      | Presenting a sense of the sacred & transcendence                 |
| Symbols need interpretation          | Phenomenology understands the practitioner's 'religious feeling' |

This relationship becomes a sacred triangle, namely humans, ancestors, and God, bound not by verbal doctrine, but by religious feeling and inner experience. Thus, incense becomes a symbol of spiritual submission, acknowledgment of human limitations, and a plea for prayers to be accepted in the divine realm.

## C. The Main Function of Frankincense in Spiritual Relations

**Table 2.** The Main Function of Frankincense in Spiritual Relations

| Dimension                   | Fungsi Kemenyan                                 |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Relationship with God       | Delivering prayers, opening sacred space        |
| Relationship with Ancestors | Honoring spiritual heritage & collective memory |
| Relationship with Self      | Calming the soul, bringing devotion             |

### 1. Frankincense in the Context of Living Islam in the Sasak Muslim Community

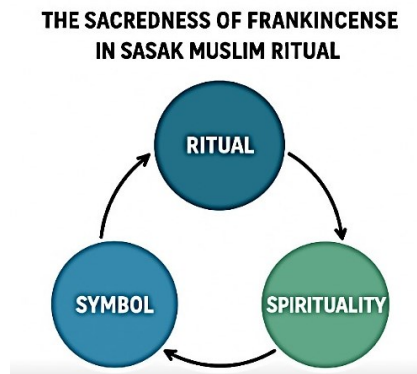
The implications of the Sasak Muslim religious tradition can be seen through several aspects that reflect openness, respect, and appreciation for the diversity of cultures and beliefs that emerge. [25] In addition to serving as a common thread regarding the intersection between beliefs and the cultures of each adherent of existing religions [26]. Thus, the emerging religious traditions became something unique. Essentially, the Sasak Muslim community combines pre-Islamic elements with Islamic teachings in their traditions, demonstrating adaptation and cultural acculturation. This reflects an openness and acceptance of various cultural and religious influences, which can strengthen interfaith tolerance. Religious practices involving incense and fragrances in the Sasak community are often intended to create harmony and social wellbeing. Awareness of the importance of this harmony can encourage mutual respect and tolerance. [27] between the beliefs of religious communities.

Acceptance and respect for local traditions that existed before the arrival of Islam demonstrate the inclusive attitude of the Sasak people. This attitude can be seen in the context of interfaith relations, especially in Lombok, where respect for other traditions and beliefs forms the foundation for living together in peace. [28] This is in line with religious ritual practices in other regions, including those that appear in religious ceremonies within the Sasak Muslim tradition, which are communal in nature and involve the participation of many community members. Thus, joint participation in religious and cultural activities [29] thereby strengthening social bonds and fostering mutual understanding, which is important in promoting interfaith tolerance. The influence of religious leaders in the Sasak Muslim community also supports the use of the sacredness of incense as part of religious tradition. According to the theory of inclusive leadership, this can provide a positive example and influence the community's attitude towards religious diversity, although in practice there are some communities that believe that the implementation of this ritual is inseparable from the Hindu-Buddhist beliefs that are still embedded. [28]

Nevertheless, the presence of rich and diverse traditions within the Sasak community can serve as a starting point for interfaith dialogue. This dialogue allows for the exchange of understanding and experiences among religious communities, which can reduce prejudice and enhance tolerance. [28] Overall, the religious traditions of Sasak Muslims have great potential to promote attitudes of tolerance among different religious communities through respect for diversity, inclusive communal practices, and religious leadership that supports social harmony or social piety [30]. By maintaining and developing these values, the Sasak Muslim community can continue to live peacefully alongside others in the context of religious diversity. This also shows that Islam is adapted to various local contexts in Indonesia, including in Lombok. [31]

The religious traditions of the Sasak Muslims, who form the majority community in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, have significant implications for interreligious tolerance. These traditions teach moderation and openness to differences in beliefs. The moderate and inclusive religious practices of the Sasak Muslims help create a harmonious atmosphere amid religious diversity. Traditions such as communal celebrations and involvement in interfaith activities strengthen mutual respect and appreciation. [32] In addition, education that teaches the values of moderation from an early age also plays an

important role in fostering tolerance.



**Figure 2.** The Sacredness of Frankincense in the Sasak Muslim Ritual Tradition

Facts show that incense is not merely used as a longstanding tradition, but becomes a medium that unites spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions. This means that this tradition is not just a heritage of the past, but a living expression of how the Sasak Muslim community understands and manifests God in daily life. The use of incense reflects that religion is not only practiced through texts and formal sharia, but also through feelings, symbols, and inner experiences. This affirms that the religiosity of the community is not singular, but plural in expression, without deviating from the core of monotheism. The incense tradition shows that local spirituality can serve as a bridge between religion and culture, while also being a source of moderation and social harmony. Therefore, this study is important to defend spiritual heritage that is often misunderstood as "innovation (*bid'ah*)", while in fact holding the wisdom of the meeting between faith and local wisdom.

At the beginning of the study, it was assumed that the use of incense in the rituals of the Sasak Muslim community might merely be a residue of pre-Islamic culture or magical practices without theological value. However, field findings actually refuted this assumption. Through phenomenological observation, it was seen that incense functions as a spiritual symbol consciously understood by ritual practitioners as a means of purifying the inner space and accompanying prayers, rather than summoning powers other than Allah. Interviews with customary leaders and local imams showed that burning incense is interpreted as an act of sensory intercession, not as a form of idolatry. Therefore, the initial hypothesis that incense is a practice devoid of religious meaning proved invalid. On the contrary, this practice contains a deep structure of meaning, uniting human relationships with ancestors and God. This hypothesis test strengthens the argument that local Islam in Sasak is reflective, not blindly syncretic, and opens up space for a model of religiosity based on existential experience.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that incense in the ritual traditions of the Sasak Muslim community is not simply a cultural remnant or a magical artifact, but holds a sacred role as a spiritual medium deeply embedded in the community's religious consciousness. Employing a phenomenological lens, incense is interpreted as a symbol rich in meaning—representing the purification of the inner self, the unveiling of transcendental realms, and the linkage between humans, their ancestors, and the Divine. The ritual observations reveal that the rising smoke of incense becomes a silent form of religious expression, cultivating an atmosphere of stillness, reverence, and awareness of God's presence. This significance is not articulated through theology but is embodied in the community's lived experience. Consequently, incense serves as a bridge between normative and cultural Islam, fostering harmony between *sharia* and ancestral tradition. Moreover, the study highlights that the sanctity of incense embodies a contextual and moderate expression of Islam, one that nurtures communal unity, social devotion, and interfaith tolerance. The novelty of this research lies in framing incense as an active spiritual entity rather than a passive cultural object, thereby contributing new perspectives to discussions on local Islam, the phenomenology of religion, and the preservation of the archipelago's spiritual heritage.

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