

Socio-Cultural And Religious Values In The Gastronomic Practice Of Megibung

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Abstract

This study explores the socio-cultural and religious values embedded in the traditional communal dining practices of Megibung among Balinese Hindus and Ngaminang among Balinese Muslims. Rooted in the cultural heartland of Bali, Megibung was historically initiated by the King of Karangasem to foster unity and egalitarianism through shared meals. Over time, this practice evolved into a sacred ritual embedded within the Balinese Hindu religious system, particularly in the Panca Yadnya ceremonies. Among Muslim communities in Kampung Gelgel, Megibung has been adapted into Ngaminang, preserving its communal structure while aligning with Islamic dietary laws and religious expressions, such as halal preparation and Qur'anic recitations.

Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, this research draws upon participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis in two villages—Seraya Tengah and Kampung Gelgel—to examine how these traditions function as symbolic systems for intercultural communication, social cohesion, and religious devotion. The study is framed by Symbolic Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory to explore how food rituals preserve tradition while accommodating diversity in Bali's plural society.

Findings reveal that both practices emphasize solidarity, egalitarianism, mutual respect, and interfaith harmony, thereby functioning as living embodiments of local wisdom. The study highlights the importance of intergenerational transmission through embodied practice and digital platforms such as youth community events and social media. It concludes by advocating for safeguarding these traditions as part of Bali's intangible cultural heritage amid pressures of modernization and tourism.

Keywords: Megibung; Ngaminang; communal dining; intercultural communication; religious values; Balinese culture

INTRODUCTION

Food, beyond its biological function, is a profound cultural and symbolic artifact through which societies articulate identity, values, and tradition. Gastronomy—the cultural study of food—reveals how communities construct meaning and sustain cohesion through ritualized culinary practices (Douglas, 1972; Santich, 2004). As Geertz (1960) notes, food consumption is imbued with deeply encoded narratives that reflect societal structures and religious sensibilities.

In Southeast Asia, communal meals such as kenduri in Java and makan bajamba in Minangkabau illustrate the ritual and symbolic power of food in reinforcing social harmony and spiritual obligations (Santoso & Mahendra, 2022). These practices, which emphasize shared consumption, moral codes, and communal obligations, form part of what UNESCO terms "intangible cultural heritage"—a living repository of local wisdom and identity (UNESCO, 2021).

Within the Balinese context, the tradition of **Megibung** exemplifies how food functions as a medium of cultural preservation and spiritual expression. Originating during the reign of I Gusti Anglurah Ketut Karangasem, Megibung was established to instill unity among soldiers by requiring them to share meals from a single platter. Over time, it evolved into a ritual integrated into Hindu religious ceremonies (Panca Yadnya) and infused with the Balinese philosophical ethos of Tat Twam Asi—"I am you, you are me"—signifying unity and egalitarianism regardless of caste, wealth, or age (Ardhana, 2021; Putra & Dewi, 2022; Yudhistira, 2020).

Parallel to this, the Muslim community in **Kampung Gelgel** developed a tradition known as **Ngaminang**, which mirrors Megibung's communal format while adhering to Islamic dietary and ritual standards. Pork is substituted with halal meats; Hindu mantras are replaced by Qur'anic recitations; and the rituals embody ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood) and sadaqah (charitable giving) (Syafitri, 2020; Zuhri, 2022). This adaptation exemplifies cultural syncretism, where shared rituals are reinterpreted within new religious frameworks to foster coexistence without theological compromise (Mubarak, 2023).

Despite these rich expressions of communal gastronomy, existing literature offers only fragmented insights. Studies by **Sulistyawati (2019)** frame Megibung as *gastrodiplomacy*—a medium for political

allegiance and cultural branding in the global tourism market. **Widiasih et al.** (2021) document its role in sustaining social cohesion within Hindu ceremonial life, while **Rafi'i et al.** (2022) explore limited Muslim adaptations in Tumbu Village. Similarly, **Dewi et al.** (2021) emphasize the potential of Megibung as a tourism attraction but warn against the commodification of its sacred dimensions.

However, most of these studies focus exclusively on the Hindu version of Megibung or its function in cultural tourism. Few have examined **Ngaminang** in depth, particularly as an interfaith adaptation, nor have they applied theoretical frameworks to decode its symbolic or communicative power. Notably missing is a comparative, interpretive approach that situates both practices as cultural dialogues in a plural society.

To address this gap, this study draws upon **Symbolic Theory** (Douglas, 1972; Lévi-Strauss, 1966) and **Communication Accommodation Theory** (Giles et al., 1991). Symbolic Theory allows for the interpretation of food rituals as systems of meaning, where structure, etiquette, and sequence symbolize social and spiritual ideals. CAT complements this by explaining how communities adjust ritual behaviors to foster inclusion and maintain identity across cultural boundaries. Together, these frameworks illuminate how **Megibung** and **Ngaminang** operate not just as communal meals, but as **rituals of communication, adaptation, and interreligious harmony**.

Accordingly, this research investigates:

1. What social, cultural, and religious values are embedded in Megibung and Ngaminang?
2. How do these values manifest in ritual structure, spatial arrangements, and symbolic acts?
3. In what ways do these traditions strengthen intercommunal relationships and cultural resilience in contemporary Bali?

Using a qualitative ethnographic approach with data from Seraya Tengah (Hindu community) and Kampung Gelgel (Muslim community), this study contributes to broader discourses on gastronomy, pluralism, and cultural sustainability. By merging anthropological, religious, and communicative lenses, it aims to offer a more holistic and regionally relevant understanding of communal food traditions in Southeast Asia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the socio-cultural and religious values embedded in the Megibung and Ngaminang communal dining traditions as practiced by Hindu and Muslim communities in Bali. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the study prioritizes the subjective meanings, lived experiences, and symbolic interactions of community members involved in these rituals (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The methodological design integrates purposive sampling, multi-site fieldwork, and theory-informed analysis to examine how food-based rituals serve as symbolic systems that express and negotiate cultural and religious identities (Yin, 2016).

A qualitative approach was chosen to capture the complexity, depth, and embeddedness of the Megibung and Ngaminang traditions. Such rituals are not easily quantifiable; they are performative, oral, and deeply embedded within cultural behavior. Qualitative research offers tools to analyze gestures, spatial arrangements, narratives, and ritual practices that reflect shared values and collective memory (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To enable a rich and comparative understanding of how similar ritual forms manifest in distinct religious communities, two sites were selected. Seraya Tengah Village in Karangasem Regency represents a stronghold of Balinese Hinduism and a locale where Megibung is practiced in its original ceremonial form, especially as part of the Panca Yadnya rituals (Widiasih et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Kampung Gelgel in Klungkung Regency, an Islamic settlement with historical roots extending back to the 14th century, serves as a contemporary example of how Megibung has been reinterpreted into Ngaminang in alignment with Islamic principles (Zuhri, 2022; Arifin, 2022). Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a method well-suited for identifying individuals with deep cultural knowledge and involvement in traditional practices. This sampling strategy prioritizes the richness of information over statistical representation (Patton, 2002). Twelve key informants were interviewed: six from Seraya Tengah, including Hindu priests (pemangku), ceremonial leaders, and cultural elders, and six from Kampung Gelgel, including Muslim clerics (imam), community heads, and Ngaminang organizers. Diversity across age, gender, and ritual roles was maintained to capture a comprehensive spectrum of perspectives. All participants were actively engaged in the planning, enactment, or intergenerational transmission of the respective traditions.

To gather data, the research employed three complementary techniques. First, participant observation rooted in ethnographic practice allowed for immersive engagement in Megibung and Ngaminang events.

This enabled documentation of non-verbal cues, spatial arrangements, and performative gestures such as communal handwashing, coordinated food serving, and prayer sequences (Spradley, 1980). Second, semi-structured interviews provided rich, narrative accounts of participants' interpretations of ritual meaning, perceived transformations, and reflections on interfaith relations. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and Balinese, recorded, transcribed, and translated, using an open-ended guide that encouraged reflexive storytelling (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Third, secondary data including cultural reports, local manuscripts, and relevant academic literature was analyzed to provide historical grounding and enhance data triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Participants provided verbal informed consent, and ethical protocols regarding confidentiality and cultural sensitivity were rigorously observed.

Interpretation of the data was guided by two interrelated theoretical frameworks: Symbolic Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Symbolic Theory, articulated by Douglas (1972) and expanded by Lévi-Strauss (1966), conceptualizes food as a semiotic system through which societies express moral boundaries, social hierarchies, and religious ideology. Douglas's notion of "deciphering a meal" was applied to analyze elements such as silence, seating arrangements, hand usage, and food sharing as manifestations of deeply embedded cultural codes. Lévi-Strauss's "culinary triangle"—comprising raw, cooked, and rotten categories—provided a lens through which food preparation stages in Megibung and Ngaminang could be interpreted as metaphors for transformation, spiritual purity, and cultural adaptation.

In parallel, CAT (Giles et al., 1991) was employed to examine the communicative behaviors observed during the rituals. CAT posits that people adjust their speech and behaviors either to converge (reduce social distance) or diverge (emphasize identity differences) in interactions. In this study, convergence was evident in ritual elements such as synchronized eating, uniform seating, and reciprocal greetings, which enhanced intergroup cohesion. Despite differing theological foundations, both Hindu and Muslim communities displayed analogous behaviors—silence before meals, modest dress, and shared platters—that reflected a convergence strategy aimed at reinforcing shared values of humility, unity, and spiritual discipline. These adaptations illustrate how religious groups maintain identity while accommodating each other's cultural expressions.

Thematic Analysis was employed to analyze the data, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, definition and naming of themes, and final narrative synthesis. Manual coding using a thematic matrix allowed for the identification of recurrent patterns across interviews, observations, and documents. The primary themes that emerged included communal solidarity, ritual adaptation, interreligious empathy, and symbolic pedagogy. This matrix approach facilitated visual mapping of overlapping values and helped highlight areas of divergence and convergence between the two traditions. Data credibility was reinforced through triangulation, comparing findings from observations, participant narratives, and documentary sources to ensure a well-rounded and validated interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017).

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were paramount. Approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants were fully informed of the study's aims and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any point. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and publications to protect confidentiality. Special care was taken not to disrupt religious observances: in Seraya Tengah, research activities were timed to avoid interference with temple rites; in Kampung Gelgel, interviews and observations were suspended during key Ramadan prayer times to show respect and cultural sensitivity (Bryman, 2016).

In sum, the qualitative, interpretive, and ethically grounded methodology employed in this study enabled a rich, comparative understanding of Megibung and Ngaminang as ritual expressions of religious accommodation, symbolic communication, and cultural sustainability in Bali's plural society. Through immersive fieldwork, theoretical rigor, and thematic clarity, the study elucidates how shared food rituals transcend theological boundaries and function as living archives of communal identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Megibung: Ritual Practice and Cultural Significance

Historical Origins and Royal Foundations

The tradition of Megibung finds its origin in the 17th century during the reign of I Gusti Anglurah Ketut Karangasem, the king of the Karangasem Kingdom in East Bali. Initially conceptualized as a military practice, Megibung was introduced to foster unity, camaraderie, and trust among soldiers. By dining from

a shared tray, distinctions of hierarchy were symbolically suspended, allowing for the formation of egalitarian bonds on the battlefield (Suryawan, 2018; Ardhana, 2021).

Over time, this practice evolved from its militaristic context into a deeply spiritual and communal tradition within Balinese Hindu society. Its royal lineage endowed Megibung with historical prestige and sacred legitimacy, positioning it as a living artifact of adaptive cultural resilience. As Pramezvary et al. (2024) argue, the practice's continued relevance reflects its flexibility in negotiating social change while retaining symbolic fidelity.

Ritual Structure: Mebat, Communal Dining, and Closure

Megibung unfolds in three sequential stages: mebat (preparation), communal dining, and ritual closure. Each phase integrates sacred symbolism and structured collective participation. During mebat, gendered divisions of labor emerge: women prepare rice, vegetables, and ritual offerings (banten), while men handle animal slaughter and cook dishes like lawar and sate lilit (Putra & Dewi, 2022). Utensils are cleansed with tirta (holy water), and mantras are chanted, sacralizing the culinary process.

In the dining phase, participants sit on the floor around a large tray (dulang) lined with banana leaves, typically shared by four to six individuals. Meals commonly include rice, meat (often pork or chicken), vegetables, and condiments such as sambal matah. Eating is conducted silently, with only the right hand used, symbolizing purity and discipline (Yudhistira, 2020).

The ritual concludes with the sprinkling of tirta by a pemangku (Hindu priest), collective expressions of gratitude, and ethical redistribution of leftovers. This final stage reinforces ecological ethics (palemahan) and the Balinese doctrine of yadnya, or sacrificial offering.

Symbolism and Unwritten Moral Codes

Beyond the formal structure, Megibung is governed by unwritten moral codes that articulate values of humility, equality, and shared experience. The principle of sama rasa—that no one begins eating until everyone is served—emphasizes communal empathy and suppresses individualistic behavior (Putra & Dewi, 2022). Silence during meals further fosters a sacred atmosphere, reinforcing introspection and reverence.

All participants—irrespective of caste, gender, or social rank—sit at the same level, encircling the food. This spatial arrangement physically enacts egalitarian ideals, momentarily dissolving the stratified structures of Balinese society (Wardana, 2021). Even the communal handwashing ritual serves as a symbolic act of purification, preparing participants to receive both physical and spiritual nourishment.

Integration into the Panca Yadnya Cycle

Megibung is embedded within the Panca Yadnya, the five principal ritual offerings in Balinese Hinduism:

- Dewa Yadnya: Offered after temple ceremonies as acts of divine gratitude.
- Pitra Yadnya: Conducted during funerals (ngaben) to honor ancestral spirits.
- Manusa Yadnya: Featured in rites of passage like weddings or tooth-filing (metatah), symbolizing human growth and unity.

This integration highlights the ritual's holistic role in sacred and secular life, where food becomes a medium of ethical and spiritual transmission.

Philosophical Foundations: Tri Hita Karana and Tat Twam Asi

Megibung performs the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, which seeks harmony among humans (pawongan), the environment (palemahan), and the divine (parahyangan) (Artayasa & Sutama, 2020). It also enacts the maxim Tat Twam Asi—“I am you, and you are me”—through the shared tray that nullifies caste and class distinctions.

According to Wardana (2021), such rituals are “living pedagogies” that transmit moral, social, and spiritual values across generations. In this way, Megibung emerges not merely as a dining custom, but as an institution of embodied philosophy, collective ethics, and enduring social resilience.

4.2 Ngaminang: Islamic Adaptation of a Shared Tradition

Cultural and Religious Context: The Muslim Minority in Bali

In the predominantly Hindu landscape of Bali, the enduring presence of Muslim communities represents a notable yet underexplored dimension of the island's multicultural fabric. Communities such as Kampung Gelgel in Klungkung Regency and Pegayaman in Buleleng Regency have maintained strong Islamic identities while coexisting peacefully with their Hindu neighbors for centuries (Zuhri, 2022; Arifin, 2022). One of the most culturally significant manifestations of this coexistence is Ngaminang—a ritual communal meal that mirrors the structure of the Hindu-rooted Megibung but aligns with Islamic ethics and theology.

Ngaminang illustrates what Syafitri (2020) refers to as ritual convergence: the ability of minority religious communities to adopt and reinterpret dominant cultural practices without compromising their spiritual principles. In this case, Muslim communities reframe the communal dining form of Megibung through the lens of halal dietary laws, Islamic ritual purity, and Qur'anic invocation, while maintaining shared values of unity, humility, and communal cooperation.

Halal Adaptation and Ritual Structure

The core of Ngaminang lies in its fidelity to Islamic precepts, particularly those surrounding halal dietary regulations and ritual cleanliness (taharah). While preserving the communal format of a shared meal on banana-leaf-lined trays, the ritual substitutes pork—customary in Megibung—with halal protein sources such as chicken, beef, and goat. Tofu, tempeh, and vegetables often accompany these meals, prepared in accordance with zabiha slaughtering standards (Nasution, 2022).

Moreover, traditional Balinese spice mixes (base genep) are modified to exclude ingredients that may conflict with Islamic dietary codes, such as fermented pastes or alcohol-based marinades. All cooking utensils and serving ware are ritually cleansed to ensure both physical and spiritual hygiene. Before eating, participants recite du'a or selected verses from the Qur'an—an Islamic parallel to the mantra recitations in Megibung (Zuhri, 2024).

Despite these differences, the structural elements remain remarkably similar: participants of all ages sit cross-legged in circular arrangements, meals are eaten quietly with the right hand, and volunteers coordinate post-meal cleaning. This spatial and procedural similarity is emblematic of how minority traditions can retain theological distinctiveness while engaging harmoniously within a shared cultural framework (Syafitri, 2020).

Ritual Significance During Ramadan

Ngaminang takes on heightened religious and communal significance during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. In Kampung Gelgel and Pegayaman, large-scale iftar events—the ritual evening meal that breaks the fast—are organized in mosques, courtyards, and communal homes. Halal meals are prepared cooperatively and shared at sunset following the adhan (call to prayer), evoking the gotong royong spirit of Megibung (Mubarak, 2023).

Crucially, these events integrate local aesthetic and procedural norms. Platters are laid on banana leaves; seating and serving sequences mirror Megibung conventions. Such localized adaptation reinforces both cultural continuity and spiritual integrity, allowing Ngaminang to serve simultaneously as an act of worship and an affirmation of belonging within Bali's broader cultural tapestry.

Interfaith Reciprocity and Social Cohesion

Perhaps the most compelling dimension of Ngaminang is its function in fostering interreligious harmony. In both Kampung Gelgel and Pegayaman, Muslim and Hindu neighbors actively participate in each other's major celebrations. During Idul Fitri, Hindu community members assist with logistics or food preparation, while Muslims offer support or attend as observers during Hindu ceremonies such as Galungan and Kuningan (Saputra & Dewi, 2022).

This reciprocal participation exemplifies the Balinese principle of menyama braya—treating others as kin—which transcends doctrinal boundaries. As Arifin (2022) emphasizes, shared rituals like Ngaminang operate as symbolic spaces for interfaith empathy, helping mitigate sectarian tension and build lasting social capital in multireligious settings.

Cultural Resilience and Adaptive Continuity

Ngaminang reflects the resilience of Balinese Muslim communities in preserving their religious identity while navigating a predominantly Hindu cultural landscape. Rather than resisting dominant cultural forms, these communities adapt them—retaining shared values while modifying content to meet theological criteria. This practice aligns with Hobsbawm's (2020 reprint) concept of "invented traditions," whereby new customs are created or transformed to sustain social relevance.

The ethical underpinnings of Ngaminang—respect, humility, mutual support—mirror both Islamic teachings and Balinese social norms. Through shared meals, these values are not only expressed but reinforced, demonstrating how food can serve as a conduit for religious devotion, cultural affirmation, and communal diplomacy (Mubarak, 2023; Zuhri, 2024).

4.3 Shared Social, Cultural, and Religious Values

The communal dining traditions of Megibung and Ngaminang in Bali demonstrate how ritualized food practices serve as vessels for deeply embedded social, cultural, and religious values. Though rooted in Hindu and Islamic cosmologies respectively, both traditions reveal shared commitments to solidarity, egalitarianism, and spiritual discipline. These values are not simply abstract ideals but are enacted through

ritualized behaviors, spatial configurations, and collective etiquette. Drawing on Symbolic Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), this section explores how these values are structured and expressed in Balinese Hindu and Muslim contexts.

Social Values: Solidarity, Equality, and Ritualized Restraint

At their core, both Megibung and Ngaminang aim to cultivate a sense of communal belonging. Participants sit on the ground in circular formations—dulang in Megibung and banana-leaf trays in Ngaminang—eliminating visual and physical hierarchies. Individuals of varying socioeconomic backgrounds share the same food, use their right hand, and begin eating only after everyone is served (Yudhistira, 2020; Wardana, 2021). This collective etiquette enacts the Balinese principle of sama rasa—equal feeling and mutual respect.

Such practices mirror Victor Turner's (2020 reprint) concept of *communitas*, wherein ritual fosters spontaneous, egalitarian unity across structural divisions. Similarly, CAT posits that convergence in behavior—e.g., shared silence, synchronized actions—facilitates social harmony by minimizing perceived social distance (Giles et al., 1991). In both traditions, ritual discipline transforms the meal into a communal moral exercise.

Cultural Values: Food as Heritage and Embodied Knowledge

Food in these rituals is more than sustenance—it functions as a vehicle of cultural memory and identity. Dishes like lawar, ayam betutu, and sayur asem in Megibung, or kolak and halal versions of sate in Ngaminang, are prepared using inherited recipes, regional ingredients, and techniques passed down through generations (Putra & Dewi, 2022; Pramezwary et al., 2024). These rituals encode ecological knowledge and social customs, forming what Santoso and Mahendra (2022) describe as “living archives” of intangible cultural heritage.

Rituals also reinforce gendered interdependence. In Megibung, men typically handle fire-based meat preparation, while women prepare offerings and side dishes. In Ngaminang, men conduct zabiha and outdoor cooking, while women oversee rice, desserts, and child supervision (Mubarak, 2023). While these roles are traditional, they are not hierarchical; rather, they affirm reciprocal duties essential to communal success.

Crucially, children learn through participation. They observe and assist in food preparation, ritual sequencing, and etiquette—becoming informal apprentices in what Wardana (2021) terms “cultural classrooms.” These acts of embodied transmission reflect Mary Douglas's (1972) Symbolic Theory, which argues that food and its preparation carry semiotic weight—marking group identity, hierarchy, and shared cosmologies.

Furthermore, Ngaminang, as an Islamic reinterpretation of the Hindu-rooted Megibung, illustrates what Hobsbawm (2020 reprint) calls “invented traditions”—practices that evolve while preserving core meanings. This adaptive flexibility ensures that cultural identity remains resilient amid theological transformation.

Religious Values: Purity, Gratitude, and Sacredness

Though based in different faiths, both rituals ritualize food as a spiritual offering. Megibung aligns with the Panca Yadnya system of Balinese Hinduism, integrating meal-sharing into ceremonies for gods, ancestors, and spirits. Ritual elements include the sprinkling of tirta (holy water), use of mantras, and ethical meal conduct as a form of yadnya—a selfless offering (Ardhana, 2021).

Ngaminang, particularly during Ramadan, begins and ends with du'a and follows halal guidelines in food selection and preparation. Concepts like taharah (cleanliness) and niyyah (intention) transform the meal into ibadah (worship) (Nasution, 2022). Both rituals emphasize reverence, modesty, and gratitude—values reinforced by silence, orderly eating, and post-meal blessings.

Symbolically, both traditions sacralize the mundane act of eating. By establishing behavioral codes around consumption, they communicate a sense of the sacred, creating what Giles et al. (1991) describe as “convergent ritual codes” that allow interfaith empathy through structurally similar expressions.

Theoretical Integration: Ritual Convergence and Value Transmission

Symbolic Theory offers a robust lens for understanding how food rituals encode and transmit social values. Shared trays symbolize unity; prayer bookends sacralize the act; and silence reinforces respect. These rituals are performative texts, where every gesture is semantically loaded with communal meaning. CAT further illuminates how Ngaminang adapts elements of Megibung to align with Islamic norms while maintaining convergent behavioral cues. This behavioral alignment promotes mutual intelligibility, even in religiously diverse contexts (Syafitri, 2020; Zuhri, 2024).

Ultimately, these traditions are not isolated expressions of faith or identity—they are living systems of moral education, intergenerational memory, and social convergence. In a globalized world, they exemplify how ritual can adapt without eroding its symbolic power.

4.4 Comparative Analysis

Although Megibung and Ngaminang originate from different religious traditions—Hinduism and Islam respectively—their ritual structures, symbolic gestures, and cultural functions exhibit profound **convergences**. This comparative analysis synthesizes key elements of both traditions using three focal lenses: **ritual components**, **values emphasized**, and **gender roles and communal labor**. The juxtaposition demonstrates that despite theological distinctions, both practices converge on promoting solidarity, discipline, and communal harmony.

Ritual Components: Shared Formats, Distinct Theologies

Both traditions begin with ritual purification and prayer, though their **religious content differs**. In Megibung, the meal commences with the sprinkling of **tirta (holy water)** and **Hindu mantras** invoking divine blessings and ancestral reverence (Putra & Dewi, 2022). In contrast, Ngaminang begins with a **du'a (Islamic prayer)** and sometimes selected verses from the **Qur'an**, affirming gratitude to Allah and reinforcing ritual purity (Zuhri, 2024).

Despite differences in prayer language and cosmology, the **structural function is identical**: both rituals sacralize the meal, reinforcing a spiritual frame before consumption. As Mubarak (2023) notes, such practices create a “ritual threshold” where participants shift from daily to sacred time, regardless of religious background.

The **food types** differ according to religious law: Megibung may include pork and lawar, while Ngaminang restricts the menu to **halal** dishes like chicken or fish. However, both use **banana leaf platters**, rice-based meals, and locally sourced ingredients—indicating a shared reliance on regional agricultural practices and aesthetic presentation (Pramezvary et al., 2024).

Seating arrangements further reinforce **egalitarianism**. In both rituals, participants sit on the ground in a **circular formation**, eliminating social hierarchies in favor of a flattened, communal space. Such arrangements reflect **Tat Twam Asi** in Hinduism (“I am you, you are me”) and **Ukhuwah Islamiyah** (Islamic brotherhood) in Islam (Wardana, 2021; Syafitri, 2020).

Table 1: Comparative Table – Megibung vs. Ngaminang

Aspect	Megibung (Hindu)	Ngaminang (Muslim)	Shared Elements
Opening Ritual	Tirta sprinkling and Hindu mantras	Du'a and Qur'anic recitation	Ritual purification and collective prayer
Food Types	Rice, pork, lawar, vegetables	Rice, chicken, halal meat, vegetables	Use of regional dishes and communal platters
Seating Arrangement	Circular, caste-neutral seating	Circular, status-neutral seating	Emphasis on equality and humility
Prayer Content	Mantras to deities and ancestors	Islamic du'a, gratitude to Allah	Sacred context before eating
Values Emphasized	Tat Twam Asi, Tri Hita Karana, solidarity	Ukhuwah Islamiyah, humility, brotherhood	Respect, patience, community unity
Gender Roles	Men: meat preparation; Women: offerings and side dishes	Men: zabiha and main dishes; Women: rice, vegetables, and child support	Complementary gender-based ritual labor
Communal Labor	Mebat (preparation), shared cooking and cleanup	Pre-iftar preparation, shared serving and cleanup	Intergenerational, cooperative preparation and division of work

Values Emphasized: Unity, Respect, and Shared Identity

Both Megibung and Ngaminang exemplify shared social and moral values, enacted through synchronized ritual behaviors such as waiting until all participants are served, maintaining silence, and showing mutual respect regardless of caste, age, or economic status. Rooted in **Tri Hita Karana**, Megibung promotes harmony among humans, nature, and the divine, evident in its minimal waste practices, the use of banana leaves, and rituals of gratitude (Ardhana, 2021). Ngaminang, grounded in Islamic values, emphasizes

taharah (cleanliness), niyyah (intent), and humility (Nasution, 2022). Behavioral codes like modest attire, right-hand eating, and coordinated dining illustrate a shared ethic of restraint and reverence.

This ritual convergence aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which posits that intergroup harmony can emerge from behavioral alignment (Giles et al., 1991). Despite differing theological bases, both traditions converge in practice, underscoring unity over difference.

Gendered labor division further reflects cultural complementarity rather than hierarchy. In Megibung, men handle meat preparation while women prepare offerings and side dishes (Putra & Dewi, 2022). Similarly, in Ngaminang, men conduct zabiha while women oversee domestic and food-related tasks (Mubarak, 2023). These divisions support interdependence within communal settings.

Importantly, both rituals serve as intergenerational “cultural classrooms” where children learn through participation (Wardana, 2021). As Hobsbawm (2020 reprint) asserts, rituals are “invented traditions,” continually reinterpreted to address changing communal needs. In this light, Megibung and Ngaminang exemplify the adaptability of ritual forms in sustaining intercultural harmony.

4.5 Intergenerational Transmission and Youth Engagement

The sustainability of traditional rituals such as Megibung and Ngaminang depends heavily on their ability to resonate with and adapt to younger generations. In Bali’s rapidly evolving socio-cultural environment, youth are not mere inheritors of tradition but critical agents in its transmission, reinvention, and sustainability. This section examines how ritual participation, educational institutions, and digital platforms foster intergenerational knowledge transfer and ensure cultural continuity in the digital age.

Youth Participation in Ritual Preparation

Youth engagement in communal rituals functions as a form of informal education—what Wardana (2021) calls “cultural classrooms.” In Megibung, children often begin with logistical tasks such as washing banana leaves, setting utensils, or preparing ingredients for dishes like lawar or sate lilit. Over time, this involvement deepens into an understanding of ritual sequencing, sacred etiquette, and symbolic meaning (Putra & Dewi, 2022).

Similarly, in Ngaminang, youth contribute significantly during Ramadan. Boys assist in tasks like zabiha (halal slaughter), wood collection, and food serving, while girls participate in preparing traditional desserts such as kolak and kue apem (Zuhri, 2024). These activities not only transfer culinary skills but also instill core values like humility, patience, and communal responsibility.

These experiential learning environments blend social practice with ethical development. Participation in shared dining rituals—governed by silence, coordinated movement, and shared etiquette—helps inculcate behaviors aligned with spiritual and communal ideals, transforming tradition into lived moral education.

Schools, Madrasahs, and Mosque Youth Groups

Educational and religious institutions play a growing role in reinforcing traditional knowledge. In Hindu-majority regions like Karangasem, schools include Balinese language and cultural instruction through extracurricular programs, including banten (offering) workshops and food heritage demonstrations simulating Megibung (Arifin, 2022).

In Muslim communities such as Pegayaman and Kampung Gelgel, madrasahs and remaja masjid (mosque youth groups) conduct community iftars incorporating Ngaminang. These are structured not only as religious events but also as cultural training—mentored by elders who model the correct prayers, cooking methods, and communal conduct (Mubarak, 2023). This fusion of religious and cultural education helps anchor Islamic values like ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood) in the tangible setting of communal meals.

In several locales, schools have also pioneered interfaith cultural exchanges. Hindu and Muslim students observe and sometimes participate in each other’s rituals, cultivating respect and mutual understanding—practical expressions of menyama braya, the Balinese ethic of kinship across difference (Saputra & Dewi, 2022).

Social Media and Digital Cultural Transmission

Digital media has emerged as a vibrant arena for cultural documentation and innovation. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are increasingly used by Balinese and Muslim youth to share video content featuring Megibung and Ngaminang rituals—highlighting each step, from mebat preparation to the final prayers.

Short clips often include narrative overlays that explain symbolic meanings, thereby transforming traditional rituals into accessible and visually engaging cultural archives. Influencers like @kulinerbali and Muslim vloggers from Pegayaman regularly attract thousands of views by showcasing ritual meals, religious

meaning, and intergenerational family preparation (Nasution, 2022). These acts of sharing constitute what Pramezvary et al. (2024) call “performative archiving,” a form of living heritage shaped for the digital public.

Moreover, social media fosters interactive learning. Viewers ask questions, post reflections, or replicate rituals based on shared content. This kind of digitally mediated cultural adaptation reflects what Giles et al. (1991) term “adaptive convergence”—when individuals shift behaviors to maintain communicative and cultural cohesion.

Cultural Sustainability in the Digital Era

Cultural sustainability entails not merely conserving traditions but dynamically reinterpreting them across generations. Rituals such as Megibung and Ngaminang persist because they are continually refreshed through youth participation, educational integration, and digital innovation. This triangulation ensures that traditional practices remain meaningful in modern contexts.

As Wardana (2021) observes, rituals endure not through static preservation but through relevance. When youth document, adapt, and teach these rituals—both offline and online—they act as cultural stewards, bridging heritage and modernity. Their involvement secures the continued vitality of communal dining as a vehicle for moral education, spiritual reflection, and intercultural solidarity in a pluralistic Bali.

4.6 Broader Regional Parallels: Megibung, Ngaminang, and the ASEAN Ethos of Communal Dining Shared Culinary Cosmologies in Southeast Asia

Communal dining is a foundational cultural expression in Southeast Asia, where food functions not merely as sustenance but as a spiritual and social ritual. Across Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines, traditions like kenduri, selametan, makan bajamba, and begibung embody the region’s deeply ingrained belief in food as a sacred medium of connection—among humans, ancestors, and the divine (Anderson, 2005; Rahayu, 2022). Within this shared cultural ecology, Megibung and Ngaminang stand out as uniquely Balinese contributions that resonate with broader ASEAN patterns of ritualized gastronomy.

Java and the Malay World: Kenduri and Selametan

In Java and parts of the Malay world, kenduri and selametan are central ritual feasts, usually held during life-cycle ceremonies or Islamic festivals. These events blend Islamic prayers (e.g., tahlil, yasin) with communal meals served on mats, fostering solidarity and invoking spiritual blessings (Geertz, 1960; Santoso & Mahendra, 2022). Like Ngaminang, selametan meals are halal, modest, and oriented around ethical values such as patience, silence, and equal serving order—mirroring Megibung’s principles of sama rasa and tat twam asi. In both traditions, food like nasi tumpeng (Java) and lawar (Bali) carry symbolic weight, representing cosmic balance and gratitude.

Minangkabau Highlands: Makan Bajamba

The Minangkabau practice of makan bajamba (or makan bersama) in West Sumatra shares further parallels. Conducted during religious festivals or community ceremonies, this ritual involves men and women eating in segregated groups from long banana-leaf trays (Amrah, 2022). While gender segregation differs from the caste-neutral, mixed-gender seating in Megibung, both rituals emphasize decorum, shared responsibility, and intergenerational participation. In makan bajamba, halal preparation, Quranic prayers, and strict adherence to adat (customary law) show how Islamic theology coexists with indigenous culinary formats—just as Ngaminang aligns Islamic piety with Balinese aesthetics.

Begibung in Lombok: A Sibling Tradition

Perhaps the closest cognate to Megibung is begibung in Lombok. Practiced by both Sasak Muslims and Balinese Hindus, begibung involves shared trays, banana leaves, floor seating, and a rule that no one eats before everyone is served (Saputra, 2023). The Sasak version incorporates Islamic du'a and halal dishes, while Hindu renditions maintain the use of tirta, banten offerings, and mantra chanting. This interreligious overlap reflects the long-standing cultural exchange between Bali and Lombok—driven by royal alliances, migration, and trade. Both islands embrace the value of menyama braya (treating others as kin), reinforcing a regional commitment to pluralism and ritual harmony (Yudhistira, 2020).

Gastronomy as a Regional Moral System

Across ASEAN, ritualized food-sharing functions as a moral theater where hospitality, reverence, and ethical conduct are learned and performed. Whether in Thai bintabat ceremonies, Bruneian dulang feasts, or Indonesian kenduri, food acts as both boundary and bridge—distinguishing religious identity while enabling intergroup closeness (Hobsbawm, 2020 reprint). Ngaminang exemplifies this: a Muslim reinterpretation of a Hindu ritual that retains its spatial etiquette, silence, and collective ethos while adhering to Islamic dietary law (Syafitri, 2020).

These traditions increasingly feature in cultural tourism and heritage programs. As UNESCO (2021) notes, such rituals contribute to intangible cultural heritage by fostering interfaith dialogue, ecological awareness, and economic sustainability. Recognizing Megibung and Ngaminang within this broader gastronomic framework not only elevates their local importance but affirms their role in shaping an ASEAN philosophy of food as communion and coexistence.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Megibung and Ngaminang are not merely gastronomic customs but dynamic cultural practices that embody the values of social harmony, religious devotion, and intercultural coexistence. Grounded in the Balinese-Hindu and Islamic traditions respectively, both rituals provide meaningful insights into how shared food practices function as vehicles for cultural transmission and interfaith engagement.

By analyzing the symbolic structures, behavioral codes, and ritual formats of these traditions, the research reveals a rich tapestry of values—egalitarianism, mutual respect, and spiritual reflection—encoded in acts of communal dining. These values are reinforced through spatial arrangements, prayer rituals, and collaborative preparation, and are further sustained through intergenerational teaching and cultural adaptation. Ngaminang, as an Islamic reinterpretation of Megibung, illustrates how ritual forms can be transformed without losing their social significance, fostering religious accommodation and shared identity.

In an era marked by religious pluralism and cultural negotiation, these traditions offer viable models for promoting tolerance, empathy, and community resilience. By positioning Megibung and Ngaminang within broader ASEAN food-sharing practices, this study underscores their relevance as both local and regional expressions of moral and spiritual unity.

7. Recommendations

To support the preservation and application of these findings in cultural policy and community engagement, the following are recommended:

- 1. Document Intangible Heritage** Local governments and cultural agencies should formally document Megibung and Ngaminang as elements of Bali's intangible cultural heritage, including audiovisual ethnographies, recipe books, and oral histories integrated into educational curricula.
- 2. Promote Interfaith Cultural Festivals** Inclusive public events centered on shared dining rituals can be platforms for cross-cultural learning, provided they maintain sensitivity to religious dietary and ritual codes.
- 3. Empower Communities Through Culinary Tourism** Both traditions offer potential for sustainable cultural tourism. Community-led initiatives should prioritize authenticity, equity, and education to ensure benefits reach local stakeholders.
- 4. Encourage Comparative Ethnographic Research** Scholars should explore analogous rituals across Indonesia and Southeast Asia (e.g., kenduri, begibung, selametan) to map patterns of ritual adaptation, religious pluralism, and culinary diplomacy.
- 5. Inform Cultural Tolerance Policies** Hybrid traditions like Ngaminang should be recognized in national and provincial policy frameworks as exemplary models of religious coexistence and cultural integration.

8. Limitations

While the study offers meaningful contributions, it is not without constraints:

- 1. Regional Scope** The study focuses on select communities in Karangasem and Pegayaman. Broader ethnographic surveys across Bali and other islands would provide greater comparative depth.
- 2. Temporal Frame** Data collection was confined to recent years. Longitudinal studies could better assess how these traditions evolve amid social change, tourism, and religious reform.
- 3. Lack of Quantitative Metrics** The qualitative emphasis offers thick description, but future studies could incorporate surveys or demographic analyses to quantify participation trends and social outcomes.
- 4. Ritual Access and Sensitivity** Some religious rituals were not fully accessible due to their sacred nature. Participant reticence may have limited critical perspectives in certain contexts.
- 5. Underdeveloped Gender Analysis** Although gender roles were mentioned, a deeper analysis of gendered access, authority, and representation in ritual labor would enrich the study's social dimension. Despite these limitations, the research contributes valuable interdisciplinary insight into ritual dining, intercultural communication, and the negotiation of religious identity in a plural society. It offers both

theoretical grounding and applied relevance for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in heritage preservation, interfaith dialogue, and cultural sustainability.

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