



Praja Mulud in Ramban Biak: Ritual Memory, Cultural Values, and Community-Based Heritage Preservation

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Abstract: This study reconstructs the historical genealogy, ritual sequence, cultural values, and preservation mechanisms of Praja Mulud in Ramban Biak Village, Lenek District, East Lombok. The tradition is an annual community celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth that combines Islamic devotion, Sasak cultural expressions, collective food preparation, the procession of Sabuk Belo, pepaosan, medicinal-oil making, religious instruction, and social care. A qualitative historical method was applied through four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Data were obtained from observation, documentation, and interviews with customary, religious, community, youth, and village-government figures. The findings show that the exact beginning of Praja Mulud cannot be fixed to a single date because its history survives through plural oral memories. Nevertheless, collective narratives consistently connect its development with the Yayasan Amal Saleh and the leadership legacy of the late Rahil. The tradition endures because it functions simultaneously as religious commemoration, embodied historical memory, social solidarity, intergenerational education, and community identity. Its continuity is supported by voluntary participation and differentiated community roles, but it is challenged by generational distance, inconsistent institutional support, contested religious interpretations, limited documentation, and the risk of reducing living heritage to spectacle. Sustainable safeguarding therefore requires community ownership, youth apprenticeship, systematic oral-history and audiovisual documentation, transparent village collaboration, and cautious cultural promotion that protects ritual authority and local meaning.

Keywords: community participation; intangible cultural heritage; Praja Mulud; ritual tradition; Sasak community

Abstrak: Penelitian ini merekonstruksi genealogi sejarah, rangkaian ritual, nilai budaya, dan mekanisme pelestarian Praja Mulud di Desa Ramban Biak, Kecamatan Lenek, Lombok Timur. Tradisi ini merupakan peringatan tahunan kelahiran Nabi Muhammad yang memadukan penghayatan Islam, ekspresi budaya Sasak, persiapan makanan secara kolektif, arak-arakan Sabuk Belo, pepaosan, pembuatan minyak tradisional, pengajian, dan kepedulian sosial. Penelitian menggunakan metode sejarah kualitatif melalui empat tahap, yaitu heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Data diperoleh melalui observasi, dokumentasi, serta wawancara dengan tokoh adat, agama, masyarakat, pemuda, dan pemerintahan desa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa awal kemunculan Praja Mulud tidak dapat ditetapkan pada satu tahun tertentu karena sejarahnya diwariskan melalui ingatan lisan yang beragam. Meskipun demikian, narasi masyarakat secara konsisten menghubungkan perkembangannya dengan Yayasan Amal Saleh dan warisan kepemimpinan almarhum Rahil. Tradisi tetap bertahan karena berfungsi sekaligus sebagai peringatan keagamaan, ingatan sejarah yang diwujudkan dalam praktik, solidaritas sosial, pendidikan antargenerasi, dan identitas komunitas. Keberlanjutannya ditopang partisipasi sukarela dan pembagian peran sosial, tetapi

menghadapi jarak generasi, dukungan kelembagaan yang belum konsisten, perbedaan penafsiran keagamaan, keterbatasan dokumentasi, serta risiko komodifikasi. Pelestarian berkelanjutan memerlukan kepemilikan komunitas, kaderisasi pemuda, dokumentasi sejarah lisan dan audiovisual, kerja sama desa yang transparan, serta promosi budaya yang tetap melindungi otoritas ritual dan makna lokal.

Kata Kunci: komunitas Sasak; partisipasi masyarakat; Praja Mulud; tradisi ritual; warisan budaya takbenda



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Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage is sustained not merely because a community remembers that a practice existed, but because people continue to perform, negotiate, and transmit it. The 2003 UNESCO Convention defines safeguarding broadly through identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, and revitalization, while recognizing communities as central actors rather than passive recipients of expert intervention (UNESCO, 2003, 2022). This emphasis is important for religious traditions that survive through bodily practice, oral explanation, material objects, seasonal repetition, and collective obligation. Such traditions are not static remnants. Their continuity depends on the capacity of local actors to reproduce meaning under changing social conditions.

Culture and sustainability are connected in several ways. Culture may be treated as a resource for development, a mediator that shapes development choices, or the foundation through which a community defines a desirable future (Soini & Dessein, 2016). Cultural policy scholarship similarly stresses that sustainable development should not reduce culture to economic utility; it must also protect cultural rights, diversity, participation, and the ability of communities to define their own values (Duxbury et al., 2017). In this sense, safeguarding a ritual tradition requires attention to two dimensions at once: the visible continuity of an event and the less visible continuity of authority, knowledge, ethical norms, and relationships that allow the event to remain meaningful.

Indonesia's Maulid traditions provide a significant field for examining these issues. The commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth is practiced in numerous regional forms, showing long processes of encounter between Islamic teachings and local cultural repertoires. Suriadi (2019) describes Maulid in the archipelago as an arena of cultural acculturation in which Islamic devotion is expressed through locally meaningful forms. Natasari (2021), in a study of Panjang Mulud in Banten, demonstrates that ritual objects and processions carry layered social and religious signs. More recent research on Maulid Adat Bayan in North Lombok identifies philosophical ideas embedded in local ceremonial practice and illustrates how Islamic commemoration can operate as a medium of collective identity and moral reflection (Febrian et al., 2023; Yuliana et al., 2022). These studies show that Maulid is not a uniform observance. It is a family of localized traditions whose symbols, actors, and historical narratives differ across communities.

The Sasak cultural context is particularly important because religious observance, agrarian memory, oral tradition, and customary performance are frequently intertwined. Saharudin's (2021) ethnographic discussion of local rice rituals in Lombok shows that Sasak ritual practice links cosmology, social organization, ecological knowledge, and moral

obligations. Studies of Indonesian local traditions also indicate that continuity is often achieved through selective adjustment rather than the complete preservation of every past form. Rofiq (2024), for example, shows that the sanctification of Muharram in the Suroan tradition involves both continuity and change. This perspective is useful for understanding Praja Mulud because the persistence of a ritual does not imply that its organization, participation, or interpretation has remained identical across generations.

Praja Mulud, also locally described as Mulud Bleq, is performed in Ramban Biak Village, Lenek District, East Lombok Regency. It is associated with the annual commemoration of the Prophet's birth and is centered on the Yayasan Amal Saleh complex. The ritual sequence includes collective donations and food preparation, the making of *ancak* and *rondon*, prayers before the removal of *Sabuk Belo*, a village procession accompanied by *Gendang Beleg*, *pepaosan* or the reading of traditional texts, the preparation of *Minyak Tekining-Tekanang*, a pre-dawn ritual peak, communal prayer, religious instruction, assistance for orphans and poor residents, and the distribution of food to living beings. Community members understand these activities through values of purity, mutual assistance, brotherhood, gratitude, care, and religious devotion.

The historical evidence for the tradition is primarily oral. Informants do not agree on a precise founding year, and some narratives link Praja Mulud to the spread of Islam in Lombok, while others connect it to Majapahit-Selaparang genealogies, broader cultural encounters, or the role of the late Rahil as founder of Yayasan Amal Saleh. Such plurality should not be treated simply as an error to be eliminated. Historical method requires criticism and comparison of sources, but oral-history differences can also reveal how communities organize memory, authority, and identity. The absence of a single date does not mean the tradition has no history; rather, it means that its history is embedded in layered recollections and in the repeated performance of ritual.

This issue is relevant to current heritage debates. Documentation scholarship argues that records do not only describe reality; they also participate in shaping how people understand and experience it (Gorichanaz, 2019). Community archives are therefore important for intangible heritage, especially when knowledge is held in memory, gesture, performance, and locally controlled objects (Irfaniah, 2023). DeCeulaerde (2024) further emphasizes that cultural archiving must accommodate both recorded memory and embodied memory without freezing living expressions into static institutional categories. Digital media can widen access and support transmission, but technology alone does not guarantee sustainability. Social-media research shows that digital tools can promote visibility, participation, and learning while also producing simplification, decontextualization, and uneven control over representation (Liang et al., 2021).

Heritage promotion also creates opportunities and risks. Intangible heritage may strengthen destination identity and creative economies (Arcos-Pumarola et al., 2023), and community-based heritage initiatives can support local development when decision-making and benefits remain connected to residents (Giliberto & Labadi, 2022; Shakya & Vagnarelli, 2024). However, systematic reviews warn that tourism does not automatically produce community well-being; outcomes depend on governance, participation, benefit distribution, cultural integrity, and the ability to prevent exclusion (Brooks et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Cerquetti et al. (2022) likewise argue that the enhancement of intangible heritage in rural areas must integrate memory, local knowledge, and sustainable community involvement. These insights caution against presenting Praja Mulud merely as a potential attraction without first securing community authority over its meanings and boundaries.

Previous scholarship has discussed Maulid acculturation, symbolism, philosophy, and the cultural-religious relationship, but less attention has been given to the microhistory of Praja Mulud in Ramban Biak and to the practical social mechanisms that keep it alive. The original research on which this article is based documented the history and existence of the tradition, yet its findings can be developed into a more focused analytical argument: Praja Mulud persists because ritual performance operates as a living archive that binds religious commemoration, social care, material symbols, and intergenerational participation. The same mechanism that sustains the tradition also produces vulnerabilities, particularly when knowledge remains concentrated among elders, village support is inconsistent, or public promotion detaches symbols from their ritual context.

Accordingly, this article addresses three questions. First, how is the history of Praja Mulud reconstructed from documentary information and plural oral memories? Second, what social, religious, and cultural values are enacted through its ritual sequence? Third, which community-based strategies can sustain the tradition without reducing it to a staged or externally controlled representation? The contribution of the study lies in connecting historical reconstruction with an analysis of embodied memory and community governance. Rather than treating preservation as the simple repetition of an annual event, the article conceptualizes it as the reproduction of knowledge, authority, participation, and meaning across generations.

1. Research Methods

This research employed a qualitative historical design because the principal problem concerns the formation, continuity, and interpretation of a local tradition. Historical research is not limited to arranging past events chronologically; it evaluates traces, testimonies, and contextual relationships in order to construct a reasoned account. The study followed four interrelated stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Abdurahman, 2007; Sjamsuddin, 2007). A qualitative orientation was necessary because the principal evidence consisted of oral accounts, observed practices, locally meaningful objects, and community explanations that could not be reduced to numerical indicators.

The research site was Ramban Biak Village in Lenek District, East Lombok Regency. Field data were collected in 2024. The selection of the site was based on the continuing implementation of Praja Mulud and the concentration of its activities at Yayasan Amal Saleh. The research focused on the historical narratives of the village and the tradition, the ceremonial process, the values attached to ritual elements, the roles of social actors, and the strategies used to maintain continuity.

The heuristic stage combined observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to understand the spatial setting of the village, the Yayasan Amal Saleh complex, cultural facilities, ritual preparation, and objects associated with Praja Mulud. Documentation included village information, photographs, interview notes, and written sources relevant to local history and cultural preservation. Oral sources were especially important because the beginning of Praja Mulud was not recorded in a single authoritative document. Informants were selected according to their knowledge and social roles. They included customary leaders, religious figures, community figures, youth representatives, and village-government representatives. This role-based diversity was intended to avoid relying on a single institutional perspective.

Source criticism was applied externally and internally. External criticism assessed the provenance and credibility of information by considering the informant's position, proximity to the tradition, period of involvement, and relationship to the institution responsible for the

ritual. Internal criticism compared the content of testimonies, identified points of agreement and disagreement, and distinguished between verifiable administrative information, collective recollection, genealogical claims, symbolic interpretation, and personal belief. For example, the administrative narrative that Ramban Biak became a definitive hamlet in 1967 and a separate village through later expansion was treated differently from claims about Majapahit descent or the medicinal efficacy of ritual food. The latter were reported as emic beliefs rather than established medical or genealogical facts.

Interpretation proceeded through analysis and synthesis. Analysis separated the evidence into themes: village formation, historical genealogy of Praja Mulud, ritual sequence, material symbols, religious and social values, community roles, institutional relations, and preservation challenges. Synthesis then examined how these themes interacted. Repeated annual performance was interpreted not only as an event but also as a mechanism for transmitting embodied memory. Differences among informants were not erased. Instead, they were used to identify areas of consensus, contested memory, and governance tension.

The historiographical stage organized the findings into a critical narrative that moves from historical context to ritual practice and then to continuity strategies. The account uses cautious language where the evidence is uncertain. Claims concerning health benefits, sacred properties, and ancestral connections are presented as community understandings. This distinction is essential to respect the worldview of participants without converting belief into an externally verified fact.

Trustworthiness was strengthened by triangulating data collection methods and informant categories, comparing testimony with available village information, and maintaining a distinction between description and interpretation. The study nevertheless has limitations. It does not provide a complete archival chronology of Praja Mulud, because written records concerning its earliest period are limited. It also represents the perspectives available during the fieldwork period and does not claim that all residents interpret every symbol identically. These limitations reinforce the need for a systematic community oral-history program and a collaboratively governed ritual archive.

2. Research Results and Discussion

Historical Genealogy: From Village Formation to Ritual Memory

The historical context of Praja Mulud is connected to the formation of Ramban Biak as a social and administrative space. One village-government testimony states that Ramban Biak became a definitive hamlet on February 28, 1967, when it was still part of the wider Lenek administrative area. Later territorial expansion produced several villages, including Lenek Ramban Biak, and a democratic village-head election was held in 2012. Other oral accounts give different dates or emphasize the meaning of the place name. These variations show that the village's formal administrative history and its remembered cultural history do not always follow the same chronology.

The Yayasan Amal Saleh occupies a central position in local memory. Community narratives identify the late Rahil as a socially influential figure who developed the foundation as a place for assisting orphans, poor residents, and community members who needed practical support. One oral account dates the legal establishment of the foundation to 1976 and connects it with social education and vocational activities. After Rahil's death, leadership and ritual responsibility were continued by successors. The foundation is therefore remembered not only as a physical venue but also as an ethical institution associated with care, collective gathering, and the maintenance of inherited practice.

Informants offer several explanations for the beginning of Praja Mulud. A customary figure stated that even elderly predecessors could not identify its precise first year and suggested that it developed after Islam entered Lombok, partly because the ritual includes the reading of traditional texts concerning Islamic history. A youth figure associated the tradition with Majapahit-Selaparang ancestry, while a community figure emphasized Rahil's role in developing traditions around Yayasan Amal Saleh. Another narrative referred broadly to cultural contacts involving Majapahit, Sumbawa, and Karangasem, which allegedly produced acculturation in the region. These statements cannot be merged into a single proven genealogy without documentary support.

Nevertheless, the testimonies share three stable elements. First, Praja Mulud is understood as an inherited practice that predates the current generation. Second, it is inseparable from Islamic commemoration, particularly the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Third, its modern continuity is strongly associated with Yayasan Amal Saleh and Rahil's legacy. Historical reconstruction therefore requires a layered model. The oldest layer consists of broad collective memory concerning Islamization and regional cultural encounters; the institutional layer concerns the development of the foundation and its leadership; the performative layer is renewed annually through ritual. The lack of a founding date is compensated by repeated enactment, which functions as a community chronology.

This finding supports an understanding of oral tradition as an active mode of historical production rather than a defective substitute for written records. Each performance confirms that the community recognizes the tradition as belonging to its inherited world, even when participants differ about distant origins. In DeCeulaerde's (2024) terms, cultural memory is carried both through archival traces and through embodied repertoires. Praja Mulud's history is visible in places, objects, roles, prayers, food preparation, and the authority to handle ritual items. The event is thus a living archive whose record is distributed across people and practices.

The plurality of origin stories also has a political dimension. Genealogical narratives may legitimate ritual authority, connect a community to prestigious historical formations, or explain why particular families and institutions hold responsibility. Historical criticism should neither accept all claims literally nor dismiss them as irrelevant myths. Their significance lies in what they reveal about belonging, leadership, and the moral ownership of heritage. A sustainable preservation program must therefore record multiple versions with attribution rather than publishing one simplified story as the only official account.

Ritual Sequence and Material-Symbolic Ecology

Praja Mulud is generally organized during the Maulid period in Rabiul Awal, with the central activities associated with the twelfth day. Preparation begins before the ritual peak. Residents contribute rice, coconuts, firewood, corn, tubers, glutinous rice, side dishes, labor, and other necessities. The contribution system is not merely logistical. It transforms household resources into a shared ritual provision and makes participation possible for people with different capacities. Women, men, young people, elders, religious figures, and customary figures undertake differentiated tasks.

Food preparation is regulated by local ideas of cleanliness and ritual propriety. Informants explain that certain tasks are given to girls who have not reached menstruation or to older women who no longer menstruate. The practice is understood locally as a condition of purity. In analytical terms, it demonstrates how the community organizes ritual authority through gender, age, bodily status, and inherited instruction. The article does not evaluate the rule as a medical or universal religious requirement; it records it as an emic norm that structures participation.

Among the most visible material forms are *ancak* and *rondon*, containers made from bamboo and palm or sugar-palm leaves. The research records that *ancak* is arranged in paired forms for rice and glutinous rice and may contain nine divisions or holes. Community explanations associate the square form with the Prophet's four companions and the nine divisions with Wali Songo. Such interpretations connect a locally produced object to a wider Islamic historical imagination. Because symbolic explanations may vary, the essential point is not to establish a single fixed code but to show that craftsmanship becomes a medium of teaching. The object binds natural materials, manual skill, religious memory, and communal food distribution.

The removal and procession of *Sabuk Belo* form another central stage. *Sabuk Belo* is described as a long cloth or belt, approximately twenty-five meters in local testimony, that is kept and maintained by designated custodians. Before it is removed from its storage place, a religious or customary figure recites prayers. It is then carried through the village, commonly accompanied by *Gendang Beleg*. Community members interpret the long belt as a symbol of brotherhood, friendship, unity, and mutual cooperation. Its physical length allows many people to hold or accompany it, turning an abstract value into a collective bodily arrangement.

Pepaosan, or the reading and recitation of traditional texts, adds an explicitly narrative dimension. The texts, sometimes referred to locally as *takepan*, preserve stories and teachings that connect the ritual to Islamic history and Sasak literary practice. Recitation creates a bridge between written manuscript culture and oral performance. It also demonstrates that literacy in a heritage context is not restricted to silent reading; knowledge is voiced, heard, interpreted, and socially located.

The preparation of *Minyak Tekining-Tekanang* is another specialized activity. Local testimony describes it as an oil produced from coconut and other ingredients by selected older women. Residents associate the oil with health and healing. The same belief extends to food prepared and prayed over during the ceremony. These statements must be understood as part of the ritual's cultural meaning, not as clinical evidence. Their analytical relevance lies in the way the tradition links bodily well-being, prayer, inherited substances, and trust in community knowledge.

The ritual reaches an important point before dawn. Religious figures and participants gather at approximately 03:00, recite prayers for safety, move around or toward the mosque, perform remembrance, and join the dawn prayer. The timing is explained through the remembered association between dawn and the Prophet's birth. The transition from night to morning creates a temporal symbolism of arrival, renewal, and blessing. It also requires disciplined cooperation because preparation, procession, prayer, and food arrangements must converge at a specific time.

The subsequent activities include religious instruction, communal eating, assistance for orphans and poor residents, and the provision of food to animals or other living beings. These practices extend the meaning of *Maulid* beyond ceremonial display. The tradition's moral legitimacy is connected to care. The community does not only remember the Prophet through speech; it enacts generosity, hospitality, and concern for vulnerable humans and non-human life. In this respect, *Praja Mulud* resembles a social institution temporarily activated through ritual.

Traditional arts may enliven the celebration, including *Gendang Beleg* and other Sasak performances. Their presence does not simply decorate the religious event. Sound, movement, costume, and procession organize public attention and allow multiple generations to participate. At the same time, performance visibility can create a risk: outsiders may focus on spectacular elements and overlook prayer, care, discipline, and the local rules that give the

event coherence. Cultural promotion should therefore explain the relationship among ritual stages rather than isolating attractive images.

Table 1. Ritual stages, actors, and principal meanings in Praja Mulud

Ritual stage	Activities and material forms	Principal actors	Emic meanings and values
Collective preparation	Donation of rice, coconut, firewood, tubers, glutinous rice, side dishes, and labor	Households, women, men, youth, elders	Mutual assistance, sincerity, responsibility, and shared ownership
Food and container preparation	Cooking; making <i>ancak</i> and <i>rondon</i> from bamboo and leaves	Women, elders, youth, craft workers	Purity, discipline, ecological material knowledge, Islamic historical symbolism
Prayer and Sabuk Belo procession	Prayer before removal; carrying the long belt around the village; <i>Gendang Beleq</i> accompaniment	Custodians, customary figures, religious figures, residents, musicians	Brotherhood, unity, friendship, protection, and collective movement
Pepaosan and oral-literary transmission	Reading or reciting <i>takepan</i> and local narratives	Readers, elders, listeners, youth	Religious learning, historical memory, Sasak literary continuity
Minyak Tekining-Tekanang	Preparation of coconut-based traditional oil under inherited rules	Selected older women and custodians	Community beliefs concerning purity, blessing, health, and inherited knowledge
Pre-dawn ritual peak	Safety prayers, remembrance, movement to/around the mosque, dawn prayer	Religious figures and participants	Devotion, renewal, discipline, and commemoration of the Prophet
Social care and distribution	Religious instruction, communal meals, assistance for orphans and poor residents, food for animals	Foundation, residents, religious figures, donors	Generosity, compassion, gratitude, and care for living beings

Source: Author's analysis based on field data, 2024.

Social and Religious Values: Solidarity, Purity, Care, and Belonging

The continuity of Praja Mulud is closely related to the values that participants experience through practice. The first and most frequently observed value is solidarity. Preparation requires residents to share resources, time, knowledge, and physical labor. Participation is not limited to a formal committee. It spreads through households and age groups, creating a temporary network in which people contribute according to ability. Social capital generated through religious ritual can strengthen cooperation when the ritual creates repeated opportunities for trust, recognition, and reciprocal obligation (Swart, 2017). In Ramban Biak, solidarity is visible in collective cooking, procession, artistic performance, prayer, and distribution.

A second value is cleanliness or purity. It appears in the selection of food preparers, the treatment of ritual objects, the sequencing of prayers, and the expectation that participants respect inherited rules. Purity is both material and moral: food must be appropriately prepared, objects must be handled by authorized persons, and participants should approach the commemoration with proper intention. This value gives the ritual discipline. However, because purity norms are socially embodied, future transmission should include careful explanation. Younger participants need to understand the local rationale and its boundaries rather than receiving rules as unexplained prohibitions.

A third value is religious devotion. The tradition is explicitly oriented to the Prophet Muhammad's birth and incorporates prayer, remembrance, mosque-centered activity, and

religious instruction. Community figures repeatedly emphasize that the custom is performed through tradition while remaining within an Islamic framework. This statement responds to a recurring challenge in local religious culture: some residents view inherited practices as legitimate expressions of devotion, while others question particular customary forms. A socio-theological approach to religious moderation suggests that constructive relations between religion and culture require dialogue, contextual understanding, and avoidance of simplistic oppositions (Muchtar et al., 2022). Praja Mulud's sustainability therefore depends partly on the community's capacity to explain which elements are devotional, symbolic, customary, or optional.

A fourth value is care. Assistance for orphans, poor residents, and other living beings connects ritual remembrance to ethical action. The centrality of Yayasan Amal Saleh reinforces this orientation because the foundation is remembered through social service. Care also appears in the maintenance of ritual objects, the preparation of food for large numbers of participants, and the responsibility of elders to teach successors. This expands the meaning of heritage: what is inherited is not only an object or performance but also a pattern of obligation toward others.

A fifth value is identity and belonging. Residents describe Praja Mulud as a tradition inherited from ancestors and characteristic of Ramban Biak. Participation produces familiarity, pride, and emotional attachment. Cultural events can contribute to well-being when they strengthen social connection, identity, and a sense of place, although outcomes vary and should not be romanticized (Brooks et al., 2023). In this case, belonging is reinforced through repeated return to the same place, the recognition of customary roles, the sound of local arts, and the sharing of food.

The tradition also contains an educational value. Children and youth learn by observing, carrying, preparing, listening, and working with older participants. This mode of learning is experiential and relational. It cannot be fully replaced by school-based descriptions or online videos. The annual event operates as a practical curriculum in local history, religious conduct, craftsmanship, cooperation, and public responsibility. This is why preservation must focus on opportunities to perform roles, not only on the circulation of information about the tradition.

Finally, community beliefs concerning the health effects of food and oil are meaningful because they express confidence in prayer, inherited knowledge, and collective care. The research treats these as cultural beliefs. Their presence should be documented accurately while avoiding medical claims. This distinction protects both academic integrity and community dignity. Heritage interpretation can explain what residents believe, how the belief shapes participation, and which ethical meanings it carries without presenting ritual products as clinically proven treatments.

Community Roles and the Politics of Continuity

Praja Mulud survives through a distributed structure of responsibility. Customary figures maintain knowledge of objects, sequences, symbols, and inherited rules. Religious figures lead prayers, remembrance, and instruction, thereby linking the ceremony to Islamic devotion. Community figures mobilize participation and household contributions. Women hold important knowledge related to food preparation, purity rules, and traditional oil. Youth provide labor, help prepare objects and spaces, join processions, and participate in cultural arts. Village-government representatives can support coordination, funding, documentation, and public recognition. Yayasan Amal Saleh provides institutional space and historical legitimacy.

This distribution is a strength because continuity does not depend on a single actor. Yet it also creates coordination problems. Field testimony concerning village-government support is

inconsistent. One customary informant stated that the tradition benefits from the village's status as a cultural and tourism village, while another reported limited support due to miscommunication and differences in religious understanding. A government representative expressed general support for local traditions but also limited detailed knowledge of Praja Mulud. These differences indicate that support may be symbolic rather than operational, and that communication between ritual custodians and formal institutions is not yet fully institutionalized.

The governance issue should not be solved by transferring control from the community to the village administration. Community ownership is fundamental to intangible heritage safeguarding (UNESCO, 2003). Formal government should facilitate rather than appropriate: providing transparent assistance, safety coordination, documentation infrastructure, and access to educational resources while respecting the authority of custodians. Written agreements can clarify which ritual components may be photographed, promoted, modified, or opened to visitors.

Generational continuity is another concern. Youth participation is visible, and informants noted increasing awareness among groups of young people. Nevertheless, annual participation alone does not guarantee mastery of specialized knowledge. A young participant may help carry equipment without learning how a ritual object is made, why a prayer occurs at a certain stage, or how conflicting historical stories should be narrated. Sustainable transmission requires apprenticeship. Each knowledge holder should work with identified successors over multiple years, and the learning process should include both practical skill and interpretive explanation.

The tradition also faces broader social change. Migration, new residents, digital entertainment, changing religious discourse, limited funding, and shifting work schedules can reduce the time available for communal preparation. Some informants compared present practice with an earlier period that they remembered as more disciplined or morally cohesive. Such assessments may contain nostalgia, but they reveal concern about weakening norms. Preservation should not attempt to reproduce an idealized past exactly. It should identify which elements are essential to identity and which can adapt without damaging meaning. Roigé et al. (2021) show that intangible heritage can display resilience through reinvention, provided adaptation is negotiated by practitioners and remains connected to community values.

Public visibility introduces additional tension. Ramban Biak's cultural potential may attract tourism and media attention. Intangible heritage can contribute to rural development when communities determine the narrative, retain benefits, and protect the practice's integrity (Cerquetti et al., 2022; Shakya & Vagnarelli, 2024). Conversely, tourism-oriented staging may shorten sequences, relocate sacred objects, prioritize photogenic performances, or marginalize residents who do not fit promotional narratives. The systematic review by Li et al. (2024) demonstrates that rural tourism outcomes depend on environmental, social, cultural, and governance conditions. For Praja Mulud, promotion should follow safeguarding, not precede it.

The most appropriate governance model is therefore collaborative but community-led. Customary and religious custodians should define ritual boundaries; community and women's groups should manage participation and social care; youth should be positioned as apprentices and documenters; the foundation should coordinate space and archives; and village government should support resources and public services. Periodic evaluation after each celebration could identify changes, conflicts, missing knowledge, and documentation needs.

This turns annual repetition into a learning cycle rather than a routine that is assumed to sustain itself automatically.

Toward a Community-Based Preservation Model

The findings suggest that preservation should be organized through five connected strategies. The first is transmission through role-based apprenticeship. Custodians should identify young people who are willing to learn specific responsibilities: making *ancak* and *rondon*, maintaining *Sabuk Belo*, preparing traditional oil, reading *takepan*, leading musical accompaniment, organizing donations, documenting oral history, and coordinating social distribution. Apprenticeship should be gradual because ritual knowledge includes trust and ethical responsibility, not only technical procedure.

The second strategy is a community-controlled archive. The archive should combine administrative records, photographs, audio recordings, video, object descriptions, ritual maps, ingredient lists, biographies of knowledge holders, and multiple oral histories. Documentation must record uncertainty. For example, the archive can preserve several narratives about the origin of *Praja Mulud*, each accompanied by the informant's role and the date of recording. Community archives are valuable precisely because they make room for voices and records that formal repositories often neglect (Irfaniah, 2023). Documentation should be stored in more than one location and use common file formats, clear metadata, consent information, and backup procedures.

The third strategy is interpretive education. A short community handbook and youth learning modules can explain the historical context, ritual sequence, local terms, social roles, symbolic interpretations, and ethical values. The material should distinguish between historical evidence, oral tradition, religious teaching, and community belief. This distinction prevents confusion and makes the tradition easier to discuss across different religious and educational backgrounds. Schools and local cultural groups can use the material, but practitioners should review it before publication.

The fourth strategy is institutional collaboration with safeguards. The village government, foundation, religious figures, customary leaders, youth groups, and cultural offices should form a small coordination forum. Its responsibilities would include funding transparency, health and safety, waste management, visitor protocols, documentation, and post-event evaluation. External funding should not create authority over ritual content. The principle is subsidiarity: decisions should be made at the closest level to the knowledge and community affected.

The fifth strategy is selective digital communication. Social media can announce schedules, introduce non-sensitive cultural elements, invite youth participation, and share educational narratives. Liang et al. (2021) show that social media can support cultural heritage sustainability through engagement and knowledge circulation. However, digital content should avoid exposing restricted objects, presenting healing beliefs as medical claims, or allowing third parties to monetize images without consent. Digital promotion should link short content to fuller contextual explanations and identify the community as the source of knowledge.

These strategies align with a broader shift from preservation as freezing to safeguarding as sustaining conditions for practice. Petronela (2016) notes that intangible heritage has social and economic significance, but its value cannot be separated from the people who enact it. Stefano and Davis (2017) similarly emphasize the complexity of safeguarding practices that are continually recreated. *Praja Mulud* will remain living heritage only if residents retain the ability to interpret, organize, and transform it responsibly.

A community-based model also needs indicators. Success should not be measured solely by visitor numbers or online views. More appropriate indicators include the number of active apprentices, the diversity of participating households, the continuity of specialized roles, the completeness and accessibility of documentation, the transparency of funding, the resolution of institutional conflicts, the involvement of women and youth, and community satisfaction with representation. Economic benefits may be considered, but only alongside cultural integrity and social inclusion.

The model therefore protects both continuity and adaptability. Essential ritual values and authorities are identified, while practical arrangements can change when necessary. Such an approach is consistent with the idea that culture can be both a foundation and a mediator of sustainable development (Soini & Dessein, 2016). It also avoids the false choice between keeping a tradition unchanged and abandoning it. The key question is who makes change, through what process, and with what consequences for meaning and participation.

Table 2. Preservation priorities for Praja Mulud

Priority area	Existing strength	Main risk	Recommended action
Historical memory	Rich oral narratives and strong connection to Yayasan Amal Saleh	Conflicting accounts may be simplified or lost	Record multiple attributed oral histories; separate evidence, memory, and belief
Ritual knowledge	Specialized custodians and differentiated social roles	Knowledge concentrated among elders; annual participation may remain superficial	Create multi-year apprenticeships for each specialized role
Community participation	Voluntary donations, labor, procession, prayer, and social care	Participation may decline because of work patterns, migration, or generational distance	Use household coordination, youth teams, and post-event reflection
Institutional relations	General recognition of cultural importance	Miscommunication, uneven village support, and differing religious interpretations	Establish a community-led coordination forum and clear decision protocols
Documentation	Existing photographs, interviews, and community memory	Fragmented files, missing metadata, weak backup, outsider control	Develop a consent-based community archive with redundant storage
Public promotion	Potential educational and cultural-tourism interest	Commodification, decontextualization, unauthorized images, exaggerated health claims	Apply visitor, media, and digital-content guidelines approved by custodians
Evaluation	Annual repetition provides a regular review point	Success may be judged only by attendance or spectacle	Measure apprenticeships, role continuity, inclusion, documentation, integrity, and community satisfaction

Source: Author's analysis based on field findings, 2024.

3. Conclusion

Praja Mulud in Ramban Biak is a living religious-cultural tradition whose history cannot be reduced to a single founding date. Its genealogy is preserved through plural oral memories concerning Islamization, regional cultural encounters, the formation of Ramban Biak, and especially the social and institutional legacy of the late Rahil and Yayasan Amal Saleh. The ritual remains meaningful because its sequence joins devotion to the Prophet Muhammad with

collective preparation, symbolic craftsmanship, the Sabuk Belo procession, pepaosan, traditional-oil making, pre-dawn prayer, religious instruction, communal meals, and care for orphans, poor residents, animals, and other living beings. These practices enact solidarity, purity, gratitude, brotherhood, responsibility, identity, and intergenerational education. The tradition's strongest preservation mechanism is repeated community participation supported by differentiated roles among customary figures, religious figures, women, youth, community leaders, the foundation, and village government. Its vulnerabilities include the concentration of specialized knowledge among elders, inconsistent institutional coordination, contested religious interpretations, fragmented documentation, generational distance, and the possibility that public promotion will detach visible performances from their ritual context. Sustainable safeguarding should therefore be community-led and organized around role-based apprenticeship, a consent-based archive of oral and audiovisual records, interpretive education that distinguishes evidence from memory and belief, transparent collaboration with village institutions, and selective digital communication governed by local custodians. The central implication is that preserving Praja Mulud means preserving the community's capacity to perform, interpret, govern, and responsibly adapt the tradition, not merely ensuring that an annual event continues to appear on the calendar.

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