

SYAIR SURAT KAPAL: THE PHILOSOPHY OF MALAY ORAL TRADITION AS ISLAMIC DAWAH IN RENGAT RIAU, INDONESIA

**Suroyo^{1*}, Derinta Entas², Novena Ade Fredyarini Soedjiwo³,
Bima Maulana Putra⁴, Antonia Soriente⁵,
and Robert Sibarani⁶**

¹*Riau University, Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia.*

²*Sahid Polytechnic, South Tangerang City, Banten, Indonesia*

³*Islamic Collage of Denpasar, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia.*

⁴*National University of Malaysia, Malaysia*

⁵*University of Naples 'L'Orientale Napoli, Italy*

⁶*University of North Sumatera, Indonesia*

*Corresponding E-mail: suroyo11002@lecturer.unri.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the philosophical depth embedded in “Syair Surat Kapal,” a cultural artifact from Riau, Indonesia, celebrated for its enchanting poetry and melodious rhythm. The research employs a qualitative methodology within the framework of cultural studies to investigate the philosophy of Islamic Da’wah embodied in the manuscript. The objective of the study is to examine the impact of Islam on “Surat Kapal,” particularly within the context of the oral tradition of the Malay community in Rengat. It traces the influence of Islamic teachings on this community’s oral heritage. This study employs literature review and interviews with seven informants from Riau. The findings of this study underscore the significant role of “Surat Kapal” in shaping the Islamic identity within the community. The underlying philosophy of “Syair Surat Kapal” as a medium for Islamic da’wah is anchored in the belief that literature and poetry are potent mediums for disseminating religious teachings and fostering moral values. The vivid imagery and compelling narrative of the poem in the manuscript not only captivate the audience but also impart significant lessons about faith and belief in God. Consequently, “Syair Surat Kapal” exemplifies the power of literature in religious and cultural propagation within an academic context.

Keywords: Islamic da’wah, Malay, Oral Tradition, Philosophy, Syair Surat Kapal

ABSTRAK

Syair Surat Kapal, warisan budaya dari Riau, Indonesia, memiliki makna kekayaan filosofis yang mendalam dalam puisinya yang indah dan alunan merdunya. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi filosofi Dakwah Islam dalam Syair Surat Kapal melalui pendekatan Cultural Studies dengan metode kualitatif. Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh Islam pada Surat Kapal dalam tradisi lisan masyarakat Melayu di Rengat, menelusuri dampak ajaran Islam yang terdapat pada tradisi lisan masyarakat. Melalui tinjauan literatur dan wawancara 7 informan di Riau, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi kontribusi Syair Surat Kapal terhadap pembentukan identitas Islam di masyarakat. Filosofi di balik Syair Surat Kapal sebagai dakwah Islam berakar pada gagasan bahwa sastra dan puisi dapat menjadi alat yang ampuh untuk menyampaikan pesan-pesan keagamaan dan memajukan nilai-nilai moral. Penggambaran puisi yang hidup dan alur cerita yang menarik menjadikannya medi yang efektif untuk menarik perhatian penonton dan menyampaikan pelajaran penting tentang keimanan dan keimanan kepada Tuhan.

Kata kunci: Dakwah Islam, Filosofi, Melayu, Syair Surat Kapal, Tradisi Lisan

INTRODUCTION

For years, scholars in Riau have researched Malay oral traditions and Islamic *da'wah*. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate various aspects of these traditions and their relationship to each other.¹ Unfortunately, there is limited research that investigates and discusses Islamic preaching (*da'wah*) and the oral habits of the Malay community in Rengat, Riau. This research focuses on the use of poetry and lectures as an oral tradition used by Islamic preachers in Indonesia because there were differences in the past. The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has affirmed that the *Syair Surat Kapal* is included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Riau Province. Initially, the *Syair Surat Kapal* lyrics was used as part of a series of wedding ceremonies. However, nowadays,

¹ Pramono, Wan Mohd Dasuki Wan Hasbullah, and Ahmad Salman Herbowo, "The Identification of Borneo Malay Manuscripts In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: A Preliminary Study," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 21, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v21i1.1106>.

this poetry is also performed during official celebrations such as Islamic holidays, official government events, and so on. The traditional Malay poem, *Syair Surat Kapal*, has significant cultural and historical value.^{2,3,4,5,6,7}

The *Syair Surat Kapal* narrates the story of a ship's journey and teaches how important it is to rely on God's guidance and protection when facing difficulties. Because ship's crews must work together to overcome challenges, this poem also emphasizes the importance of unity and cooperation among community members. For centuries, Islamic teachings in Riau were conveyed through poetry, including through *Syair Surat Kapal*. This poem tells the story of a ship that sailed from Singapore to Riau and faced many problems. This story is often used in Islamic preaching to show how important faith and perseverance (which are important values in Islam) in facing challenges. The use of *Syair Surat Kapal* in Islamic da'wah shows how important it is to use artistic and culturally relevant medium to convey religious teachings and promote positive values to local Malay people. Apart from that, the important messages conveyed in the *Syair Surat Kapal* and how these messages relate to the habits

² B Warehouse, *A Critical Edition of the Syair Perang Siak, with A Consideration of Its Literary and Historical Significance* (Donald James Goudie, 1976).

³ Adiva Septiara, Yuliantoro, and Asyul Fikri, "Eksistensi Tradisi Syair Surat Kapal Pada Pernikahan Melayu Indragiri Hulu," *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 1, no. 2 (2021): 412–18.

⁴ Muhammad Abd Rahman, "Nuansa Sastra Islam dalam Pendidikan Islam," *Mozaic: Islam Nusantara* 7, no. 1 (April 29, 2021): 79–92.

⁵ Anne Tjønndal, "The Complete Muhammad Ali," *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 421–23.

⁶ Yulita Fitriana, "Pola dan Pembentukan Persajakan Syair Surat Kapal," *Madah* 6, no. 1 (2015): 73–81.

⁷ Raimy Ché-Ross, "Syair Peri Tuan Raffles Pergi Ke Minangkabau a Malay Account of Raffles' Second Expedition to The Sumatran Highlands in 1818: Based Partially on Prefatory Material by The Hon. Dudley Francis Amelius Hervey CMG JP, Resident Councillor Malacca (1882-1893)," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 76, no. 2 (285) (2003): 25–80.

and beliefs of the people of Rengat, Indragiri Hulu, Riau.⁸ In the Rengat Indragiri Hulu community, as mentioned in literary studies, the use of *Syair Surat Kapal* for Islamic *da'wah* has been widely accepted and has been practiced for generations.⁹ However, this long tradition needs to be examined critically, as to whether the poetry was related to other religious habit or practice. *Surat Kapal Poetry* was argued to be ineffective in preaching Islam to everyone.¹⁰ This poem has an interesting storyline and clear images, so it is interesting. However, some may have a different opinion. Some members of the public may be unfamiliar with the poetry style of verse, which may hinder understanding and appreciation of the poetry.¹¹ Even though the *Syair Surat Kapal* is full of positive Islamic preaching values such as faith, perseverance and unity, this poetry may not relate to all the social and cultural issues in the Rengat Indragiri Hulu community.^{12,13}

Nonetheless, oral traditions have played an important role in spreading and maintaining religious teachings throughout history, including in Indonesia, where Islam has been the dominant religion for centuries.^{14,15,16} For generations, the Malay people in

⁸ Rofiandri Suardi and Udi Utomo, "The Art of Nandung in Indragiri Hulu Regency, Riau: The Study of Performance Form and Value," *Catharsis: Journal of Arts Education* 7, no. 1 (2018): 78–86.

⁹ Selfi Husvina, Yuliantoro, and Asyul Fikri, "Wisata Religi Makam Tuan Guru Syekh Abdurrahman Siddiq Al-Banjari Penyabar Agama Islam di Indragiri Hilir," *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 1 (2):543-51. 1, no. 2 (2021): 543–51.

¹⁰ Marlina, "Sosiologi Masyarakat Melayu Riau Dalam Syair 'Surat Kapal' Karya H. Muhammad Ali Thalib," *Totobuang* 6, no. 2 (2018): 245–56.

¹¹ A Saefudin, *Usman Janatin Dan Harun Tohir, Kisah Perjuangan Pahlawan Dwikora* (Deepublish, 2018).

¹² R Khoirunnisa, S Syafniati, and J Jonni, "Pertunjukan Berdah Dalam Upacara Perkawinan Di Desa Rantau Mapesai, Kecamatan Rengat, Kabupaten Indragiri Hulu," *Laga-Laga: Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan* 8, no. 1 (2022): 35–48.

¹³ T Rahman, *Periodisasi Sastra Dan Antologi Puisi Indonesia* (CV. Pilar Nusantara, 2018).

¹⁴ W Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–24.

Riau, Indonesia, have had a tradition of oral poetry known as Syair. This tradition is used to convey cultural and historical information. Thus, this study examines the relationship between Islamic preaching in Indonesia and the Riau Malay oral tradition.

Islamic *da'wah* in Indonesia has long combined local traditions and culture to convey Islamic teachings to the wider community.^{17,18,19,20} The use of poetry in Islamic lectures is one example. Syair is a type of narrative poetry that narrates stories with cultural and historical meaning (Azharina and Gadeng, 2017). In Islamic *da'wah*, the use of poetry helps convey Islamic teachings in a way that is easy to understand and acceptable to the people. Lectures or sermons are another way of linking Riau Malay oral traditions with Islamic *da'wah*. In these sermons, verse and other styles of spoken poetry are often used to convey Islamic teachings engagingly and memorably.^{21,22} The use of spoken language in Islamic *da'wah* in Riau also shows how important *da'wah* is in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad was renowned for his ability to tell stories, and many of his teachings

¹⁵ A Wibowo, “Penggunaan Media Sosial Sebagai Trend Media Dakwah Pendidikan Islam di Era Digital,” *Jurnal Islam Nusantara* 3, no. 2 (2019): 339–56.

¹⁶ N Zakaria and N. S Mat Akhir, “Theories and Modules Applied in Islamic Counseling Practices in Malaysia,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 2 (2017): 507–20.

¹⁷ A. R Arifianto, “Islamic Campus Preaching Organizations in Indonesia: Promoters of Moderation or Radicalism?” *Asian Security* 15, no. 3 (2019): 323–42.

¹⁸ M Stille, *Islamic Sermons and Public Piety in Bangladesh: The Poetics of Popular Preaching* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

¹⁹ W Halim, “Young Islamic Preachers on Facebook: Pesantren As’ Adiyah and Its Engagement with Social Media,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 46–60.

²⁰ Suroyo and Bima Maulana Putra, “Tradisi Nandung Sebagai Pembentukan Karakter Pada Masyarakat Rengat Indragiri-Hulu Riau,” *An-Nas* 6, no. 1 (2022): 1–13.

²¹ M Slama, “A Subtle Economy of Time: Social Media and The Transformation of Indonesia’s Islamic Preacher Economy,” *Economic Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (2017): 94–106.

²² J Scholz, “Dramatic Islamic Preaching: A Close Reading of ‘Amr Khālid,” *Religion and Aesthetic Experience*, 2018, 149.

were conveyed through stories and parables. Similarly in Islamic preaching in Riau, poems and other oral poetry forms are used.^{23,24}

Abdullah (2016) conducted one study on Malay oral traditions in Riau and its relation Islamic preaching. His study investigates the role of *hikayat* (traditional Malay stories) in spreading Islamic teachings. The research found that *hikayat* played an important role in spreading Islamic values and beliefs to the Malay community in Riau.²⁵ Later, Samad (2017) also conducted a study looking into how *silat* (Malay traditional martial arts) correlated with Islamic preaching in Riau. The study found that *silat* is often used to convey Islamic teachings and values, and many *silat* practitioners see their martial arts training as a form of devotion to their religion. However, this research found that there is a tension between traditional *silat* elements (animism) and the more modern influences that shape it (Islam). Despite these studies, there are still some gaps in our understanding of Malay oral traditions and Islamic propagation in Riau.^{26,27,28,29} Nasrullah stated that oral traditions have been used for centuries to convey Islamic teachings and play an important role in

²³ Z Mukarom and I Rosyidi, "Mediatization of Da'wah in Disruption Era: Study of Islamic Da'wah in Social Media," *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (AJHSSR)* 49 (2020): 190–202.

²⁴ E. J Thaib, "The Communication Strategies for Moderate Islamic Da'wah in Countering Radicalism in Gorontalo City, Indonesia," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 36, no. 4 (2020): 143–56.

²⁵ Abdullah Bin, Abdul Kadir, and Munsyi Abdullah, "Hikayat Abdullah (Stories of Abdullah)," 1849.

²⁶ M. S Al-Zaman, "Social Mediatization of Religion: Islamic Videos on YouTube," *Heliyon* 8, no. 3 (2022): 83–90.

²⁷ S Rijal, "Performing Arab Saints and Marketing the Prophet: Habaib and Islamic Markets in Contemporary Indonesia," *Archipel: Études Interdisciplinaires Sur Le Monde Insulindien* 99 (2020): 189–213.

²⁸ V Gardner, E. C Mayes, and S Hameed, "Preaching Science and Islam: Dr. Zakir Naik and Discourses of Science and Islam in Internet Videos," *Die Welt Des Islams* 8, no. 3 (2018): 357–91.

²⁹ Suroyo, Bima Maulana Putra, and Sri Ratnawati, "The Analysis of Islamic Theology Toward Mandi Safar Ritual in Akit Tribal Bengkalis-Riau," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 7, no. 1 (July 19, 2022): 93–108.

shaping the religious beliefs and practices of Indonesian society. Although Nasrullah's research provides valuable insight into the use of oral traditions in Islamic discourse in Indonesia, there is still a paucity of literature on the philosophical basis of these traditions. Further research is needed to examine the philosophical underpinnings of oral traditions in Islamic lectures, as well as how these underpinnings shape the content and delivery of these lectures, particularly in exploring the philosophical dimensions of this tradition.^{30,31,32,33}

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative research method with a cultural studies approach to investigate the philosophy underlying Syair Surat Kapal as a Riau Malay oral tradition influenced by Islamic preaching. This research aims to increase our understanding of the cultural and religious philosophy of Syair Surat Kapal. This research uses in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in collecting the data. Three informants namely Winda, Imron, and Ahmad (pseudonyms) were selected for their knowledge on *Syair Surat Kapal*, its content and interpretation. Another informant namely Fatmahwati (pseudonym) was selected for her Malay language comprehension and Elmustian and Yusuf (pseudonyms) for their understanding in Malay literature and language.

³⁰ Suroyo and Bima Maulana Putra, "The Tradition of The Lampu Colok Ahead of Eid Al-Fitr in Religious Values of The Malay Society in Pekanbaru," *Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Masyarakat* 18, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 12–20.

³¹ Suroyo, et al., "Influence of Hindu Tradition on Petang Megang Ritual and Its Significance to the Indigenous Muslim Community in Pekanbaru Riau," *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 11, no. 1 (June 28, 2022): 62–83.

³² Suroyo, et al., "Bedekeh Ritual and Cultural Belief of Suku Akit in Rupert Island, Bengkalis, Riau," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 20, no. 1 (2022): 173–202.

³³ Suroyo, et al., "Philosophy of Ketupat and Opor: The Spreading of Islamic Preaching through Local Culinary in Java Island," *Culture and Religion* 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 180–204.

Interviews were conducted in Malay, the local language of Riau, and audio recordings will be kept with the participant's consent. Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of participants who have the same background or experience related to the tradition. The data collection process will also include observations of storytelling events and lectures related to the *Syair Surat Kapal*.

Data collected from interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations will be transcribed and translated into English. Thematic analysis involves finding and category-zing patterns and themes in data. The research question will be the basis of this analysis, which aims to investigate the philosophy underlying *Syair Surat Kapal* related to Islamic preaching. This research adheres to ethical standards for research involving people, such as obtaining informed consent and maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of informants. In addition, this research respects the cultural and religious customs of the Malay people in Riau and will not pose harm to anyone involved.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Oral Traditions of *Syair Surat Kapal* in Rengat, Riau, and Islamic Da'wah Activities

In the beginning, *Syair Surat Kapal* as an oral tradition was used to entertain the local people, who gathered to listen to stories read by skilled storytellers. *Syair Surat Kapal* has AABB rhyme, each stanza consists of four lines. This structure allows the storyteller to tell the story in a poetic and engaging way. The use of allegory in the *Syair Surat Kapal*, are often used to convey deeper meanings and moral lessons. The *ship* represents the human soul, and the ocean represents the hardships and tribulations that humans experience throughout their lives. Allegory allows listeners to find connections between the story and their own experiences, which helps them understand the moral lesson being taught.

The themes and philosophy in the *Syair Surat Kapal* reflect the influence of Islam. The oral tradition often emphasize how important faith is, how important patience and perseverance are,

and how many rewards await those who believe in the afterlife. By combining these religious teachings, oral traditions became a useful tool for spreading Islamic principles. The oral nature of Syair Surat Kapal is one of its characteristics. These stories have been told for generations by storytellers who rely on their memories and improvisational skills to engage with the listeners. Due to this reliance on oral transmission, the content and structure of the stories differ, each reflecting the different perspectives, experiences, preferences and memories of the storytellers. Islamic *da'wah* has played a large role in the formation of oral tradition customs. With the arrival of Islam in the Riau region in the 15th century, major changes occurred in culture and society, which are reflected in the development of this narrative poetry. The stories in *Syair Surat Kapal* begin to incorporate Islamic themes and teachings, showing the growing influence of religion in the region. The stories were changed to show how important it is to maintain Islamic principles and the virtues of right living.

Philosophy of Syair Surat Kapal as an oral tradition of the Malay people in Riau, Indonesia

The Syair Surat Kapal tells the story of a ship that sailed from Singapore to Riau but encountered many problems along the way. This poem is thought to have been uttered in the early 19th century and passed down from generation to generation. Mostly, groups of singers and musicians sing these verses, accompanying them with traditional Malay musical instruments such as *rebab* and *gendang*. While the other singers provide the chorus, the main singer, known as the *penghulu*, recites the verses in a rhythmic and melodic manner. The poetry of Syair Surat Kapal has rich cultural and historical meaning for the Riau Malay Community. Some people believe that this poetry originates from the seafaring culture of the Malays, who were skilled sailors and traders. This poem shows how difficult and dangerous sailors face during long sea voyages, and how important self-confidence and perseverance are to face it all. Below is one of stanzas in Syair Surat Kapal illustrated.



Figure 1. One of the stanzas of the Ship Letter Poetry
Source: Foto Harian Riau, 2023

In addition to having significant cultural value, *Syair Surat Kapal* was studied and analyzed by Malay literary experts. They praised its poetic structure, use of metaphor, and symbolism in this poem. Overall, *Syair Surat Kapal* is an important part of the oral traditions of the Malay people in Riau and is a testament to the richness of their culture.

The message of unity, solidarity and perseverance is at the core of the philosophy of *Syair Surat Kapal*. This poem discusses how important it is to build relationships with other people and work together to face challenges. Islamic beliefs are an important part of the Rengat Indragiri Hulu community, so this philosophy is very important. Communities face many problems, including economic, social and political problems, which endanger their survival.



Figure 2. A man chants the Syair Surat Kapal during a traditional wedding ceremony
Source: <https://warisanbudaya.kemdikbud.go.id>

The poem has a message that encourages the community to unite and work together to achieve a common goal that brings greater good to everyone involved in the community. One of the reasons this poem is useful for dawah is that it is driven by Islamic principles. An *imam*, who serves as a representation of the leader of the ummah, steers this ship. The poem emphasizes how important it is to follow a knowledgeable and trustworthy person in matters of faith and commands them to respect and give direction to those on board. The poem encourages people to seek out such leaders and align themselves with those who maintain the Islamic faith. The message of perseverance in this poem suggests that people should keep believing in their faith even if they face difficulties. The ship's journey was long and challenging with many obstacles. Showing how important it is to remain steadfast in the face of adversity, the crew of the ship remained committed to their faith and persevered despite the hardships.

Overall, the philosophy of *Syair Surat Kapal* encourages the people of Rengat Indragiri Hulu to unite, seek guidance from knowledgeable leaders, and remain steadfast in their faith despite difficulties. These messages are very important for Islamic proselytization and can be an inspiration for those who want to

spread the religion. This type of poetry usually uses metaphors and figures of speech to convey moral values, advice, or lessons. People in Indragiri Hulu, Riau Province, Indonesia, can easily accept the teachings of Islam through the *Syair Surat Kapal*. The poem can be made to discuss Islamic values and teachings in a way that is easy to understand and can be related to the people around us. The ship depicted in the poem can be considered a symbol of life and the voyage to safety.

The captain and crew of the ship can serve as a representation of the followers of Islam and pious leaders who guide people towards the right path. The dangers and difficulties that the ship faces during its journey can be depicted as the obstacles and barriers that human beings face on their journey towards Allah. The poetry of the ship can appeal to people's emotions and imagination in this way, making it easier to understand and internalize the teachings of Islam. In addition, these poems can help address social issues and teach ethical and moral behavior (Figure 1).

Essentially, it is a spiritual journey that takes the reader through various phases of realization, surrender, and devotion to God's will. It encourages everyone to reflect on what they want in their lives and seek God's guidance in all that they do. It emphasizes the importance of faith, prayer, and good deeds to gain closeness to God. Over the years, *Syair Surat Kapal* has become an important part of the Islamic culture of the Rengat community of Indragiri Hulu. It is recited at weddings, religious events, and other special occasions, with the aim of educating and inspiring people to embrace Islamic values and principles. *Syair Surat Kapal* has helped the people of Rengat Indragiri Hulu maintain their Islamic identity and values. It has helped them overcome their spiritual weaknesses and improve their relationship with Allah.

When people gather to chant the verses and think about their meaning, these verses also help create unity and harmony among people in the community. In addition, the verses of *Syair Surat Kapal* are useful to the people of Rengat Indragiri Hulu in Indonesia and the Muslim community. The message of submission to Allah, renewal, and rejuvenation appeals to Muslims of

all ages and backgrounds. *Syair Surat Kapal* is an effective *da'wah* tool that has played an important role in shaping the Islamic philosophy of the people of Rengat Indragiri Hulu. The poem's messages of spiritual awakening, repentance, and obedience to Allah have helped many people become closer to their faith and live a good and pious life. The poetry has also relevant and inspiring messages for Muslims around the world because of its universality.

An important question to answer is whether *Syair Surat Kapal* can be categorized as a literary text or performance art. This is crucial to determine the appropriate methodology of analysis and interpretation. In the literary text approach, we can examine the structure, language style, implied meaning, and values contained in the poem. In addition, we can also analyze how this poem represents Riau Malay culture and tradition and compare *Syair Surat Kapal* with other Malay literary works. Meanwhile, in the performing arts approach, we can examine performative aspects, such as the music, dancers' movements, and interaction with the audience. In addition, we can also study the oral tradition and cultural context in which *Syair Surat Kapal* is performed and compare *Syair Surat Kapal* with other Malay performance art forms.

The following section presents an overview of *Syair Surat Kapal*, including the main themes discussed in the poem, the characters involved in the poem's story, the storyline, and the setting in which the poem's story takes place.

Syair Surat Kapal Tradition Reflects the Cultural and Religious Values of the Malay Community in Rengat

A series of verses, often accompanied by music, tells a story in this literary style. For centuries, the Malay community in Rengat has respected communal values, which are reflected in the *Syair Surat Kapal*. Often, several people sing this type of verse, with each person allowed to recite one verse. In this storytelling, the communal approach shows how important it is to share experiences and work together as a group. Additionally, the narrators often tell stories of individuals overcoming challenges and obstacles with the help of their communities,

emphasizing the importance of collective support and cooperation. Examples of poetry that can reflect the life and religious values of the Malay people are:

*"Di mana budi, di situ hati,
Di mana hati, di situ rasa,
Berbuat baik, jangan tukar hati,
Berteman dengan Allah, selalu syarifat."
(Source: Genpi.id)*

[Where the virtue is, the heart will be,
Where the heart is, the feeling will be,
Do good, do not switch your heart,
Befriend with Allah, always be safe]

This poem shows how important it is to have a strong relationship with God and apply religious values every day. The importance of family is another cultural value reflected in the Syair Surat Kapal. This poetry often tells the story of family members separated by distance or circumstances, and the importance of maintaining strong family ties is a recurring theme. This shows the Malay belief that the family is the pillar of society and that maintaining close relationships with family members is essential for personal happiness and social harmony. The lyrics for the ship's letter can be seen below:

(verse 1)
*Keluarga umpama tiang sokongan,
Berdiri teguh, tidak mudah goyah,
Di situlah cinta mekar,
Membimbing jiwa di jalan yang suci.*

(verse 2)
*Ruku' dan sujud dengan khusyuk,
Memohon ampunan dosa yang menumpuk,
Bermunajat kepada Allah yang Maha Kuasa,
Agar hati diliputi rasa bahagia.*

[Family is like a pillar
Standing still and strong]

There is where love blooms
Guiding soul to the holy pathway.

Bow and prostrate solemnly
Seek for forgiveness for piling sins
Contemplating to Allah the Almighty
For the heart to be genuinely happy]

Religion is an important part of the *Syair Surat Kapal*. Many Malays in Rengat are Muslim, and their poetry often speaks of Islamic teachings. Many poems show the importance of prayer, fasting, and other religious customs (stanza 2). This shows the people's commitment to their faith and their belief in the importance of living a virtuous life. Over the years, this tradition has remained, and new generations continue to learn and perform the poetry. *Syair Surat Kapal* is an important part of the highly valued cultural heritage of the Rengat people, and the community's commitment to maintaining their traditions for the next generation.

In the Malay community of Rengat and its surroundings, *Syair Surat Kapal* has attracted new attention in recent years. This has resulted in several efforts to preserve and promote this tradition. The local government of Rengat held the *Syair Surat Kapal* festival in 2016 to celebrate the tradition and raise awareness of its importance. Apart from that, the *Syair Surat Kapal* is an important representation of the identity of the Malay people. The *Syair Surat Kapal* focuses on family, religious and communal values. The form of poetry has become an important part of people's identity. There are several poems that reflect the culture and religious principles of the Malay people:

*"Barangsiapa yang beriman pada Tuhan,
Akan mendapat cahaya dalam jiwa.
Rajin beribadah, bertekun dalam doa,
Merajut kasih, menjaga harmoni, itulah cermin kehidupan yang sejati."*
(Source: Genpi.id)

[Whoever believes in God,

Will embrace light within their soul
Diligent in worship, discipline in prayer
Spreading love, guarding harmony, that is the true life.

The *Syair Surat Kapal* reflects the principles and beliefs that are important to society. His poetic verse has become an important component of people's identity and is often performed at cultural events and celebrations. *Surat Kapal* verses is another important type of artistic expression. Poetry allows people a creative and meaningful way to express their feelings and experiences. He often wrote poems about love, triumph, and loss, and the music that accompanied his poems added to the emotional effect of the performances. In short, *Syair Surat Kapal* is a type of traditional poetry that describes the cultural and religious values of the Malay people in Rengat. By emphasizing communal and family values, it is considered a traditional form of poetry.

The Role of Islamic Da'wah in the Transmission and Preservation of Syair Surat Kapal

The *Syair Surat Kapal* talks about a shipwreck in the 14th century off the coast of Sumatra, and how crews of ship on board managed to survive. This poetry is an important part of the region's cultural heritage and has been used as a tool to teach religion and history. Islamic *da'wah* has played a significant role in spreading and preserving the *Syair Surat Kapal*

After the arrival of Islam in the Malay Archipelago in the 13th century, this religion has become part of its society. The scholars who travelled from one place to another were the early preachers. They move from one place to another to spread the message of Islam and teach the Quran and Hadith. They helped preserve and spread cultural traditions in the process of converting the local population to Islam. By using poetry as a teaching tool, Islamic preaching helps preserve the *Syair Surat Kapal*. Preachers or perhaps a religious teacher will use the story of a shipwreck and how the crew and passengers survived to show the strength of faith and the importance of trust in God.

They will read the poem and then discuss it to emphasize the moral lesson that can be taken from the story. Islamic prea-

chers did much more than use the *Syair Surat Kapal* as a teaching tool; they memorized the verses and then recited them to their students, who in turn memorized them and passed them on to their own students. Even after writing became more common, these poems remained part of the region's cultural heritage due to their oral tradition.

The fact that the poems in *Syair Surat Kapal* were written in Malay, the language of the local population, makes the role of Islamic da'wah in spreading and preserving the Poetry of Surat Kapal even stronger. This means the poetry is accessible to everyone, regardless of their level of education or literacy. Preachers (*da'i*) could recite the verses to their congregations, and people could then memorize them and recite them themselves, ensuring that the verses remained part of the region's oral tradition even after written texts became more common.

With calligraphy, Islamic preaching also helps preserve the *Syair Surat Kapal*. Islamic calligraphy is a type of art that involves the use of beautiful writing to create works of art that are aesthetically appealing and spiritually meaningful. Calligraphers often made beautiful copies of the poems and displayed them in mosques and other religious places. This transformation from a poetry to calligraphy ensures that the poetry remains part of the region's cultural heritage and helps raise the profile of the poetry. In short, Islamic *da'wah* has played an important role in the spread and preservation of *Syair Surat Kapal*. Preachers used this verse as a teaching tool, read it to their congregations, and used it as a basis for conversation. Additionally, they helped spread the poetry from generation to generation, ensuring that it remained in the oral traditions of the region. The cultural importance of poetry is reinforced using calligraphy.

The role of Syair Surat Kapal in preserving and transmitting the cultural and religious heritage of the Malay community in Rengat, Riau

The cultural and religious heritage of the Malay people in Rengat, Riau, has been preserved and transmitted through the *Syair Surat Kapal* from generation to generation. This traditional poem tells the story of a ship sailing from Riau to the Arabian

Peninsula to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. The role of *Syair Surat Kapal* in preserving and spreading the cultural and religious heritage of the Malay community in Rengat, Riau, has changed over time. Historically, Malay religious and cultural traditions in Rengat, Riau, consist of several stanzas in the *Syair Surat Kapal*. These verses are sung in religious ceremonies and festivals, and oral traditions transmit them from generation to generation. The *Syair Surat Kapal* strengthens the religious and cultural identity of the people and provides a sense of connection to their heritage and history. The role of *Syair Surat Kapal* in preserving and transmitting cultural and religious heritage has changed over time for various reasons. The introduction of modern technology, such as the internet and social media, has played an important role in preserving and spreading cultural and religious practices such as *Syair Surat Kapal*. The younger generation can now access information about traditional music and stories through digital platforms.

Changes in the cultural and religious customs of the Malay community in Rengat, Riau, are additional factors that influenced the role of *Syair Surat Kapal* in preserving and spreading cultural and religious heritage. The spread of Islamic fundamentalism has led to changes in cultural and religious practices, with many young people turning to more conservative religions. This caused the popularity of traditional music and stories, including the *Syair Surat Kapal*, to decline. However, efforts to preserve and promote traditional music and stories have helped maintain the *Syair Surat Kapal*. This includes building cultural centers and holding cultural festivals to promote traditional music and stories. The government also helps preserve traditional music, such as *Syair Surat Kapal*, by providing training and financial assistance. These efforts have played an important role in preserving the cultural and religious heritage of the Malay community in Rengat, Riau.

Philosophical Concepts and Values Embedded in Oral Tradition in Syair Surat Kapal

The philosophical concepts and values in *Syair Surat Kapal* are interpreted differently by performers and audiences,

depending on their religious and cultural beliefs and beliefs. The idea of *tawakkal*, i.e., trust and dependence on God, is one of the most prominent philosophical concepts in *Syair Surat Kapal*. This poem tells how the sailors on the ship trusted God so that He could guide them to Mecca safely. The concept of *tawakkal* is very important in Islamic culture, where belief in God is considered an important part of faith. For Muslim performers and spectators, this concept often attracts attention, as it represents the main value of their religious beliefs.

The idea of *barakah*, i.e., blessing or divine grace, is another philosophical concept that is at the heart of *Syair Surat Kapal*. In this verse, God blesses the ship and its passengers throughout their journey to Mecca. This concept is important in Islamic culture, which has a strong belief in the power of divine blessings. *Syair* performers and spectators often interpret the concept of *barakah* as an illustration of the benefits that result from following the path of Islam. Sufi philosophy is also visible in this poem, especially in the way the journey to Mecca is described as a spiritual journey of the soul. One of the mystical branches of Islam, Sufism, emphasizes the spiritual aspects of the faith. This theme is clearly visible in the depiction of the ship's journey as a journey of enlightenment and self-discovery. This verse's emphasis on the spiritual aspects of pilgrimage will likely resonate deeply with Sufi performers and audiences. *Syair Surat Kapal* contains not only philosophical ideas, but also principles that are very important for Malay society. The importance of community and solidarity is one of these values. This poem talks about how the ship's passengers work together to overcome difficulties. Communal values, which are at the core of Malay culture, are reflected in this emphasis on collective effort and collaboration.

The importance of empathy and generosity is also demonstrated in this poem. Ship passengers are depicted as benevolent hosts, offering food and shelter to fellow travelers. This emphasis on friendliness and generosity reflects Malay cultural values, where friendliness is considered an important component in social interactions. It is important to remember that the interpretation of the *Syair Surat Kapal* is not fixed and has changed

throughout the ages. For example, a Muslim audience might see the poem's emphasis on *tawakkal* and *barakah* in a more literal sense, while a non-Muslim audience might see the poem's emphasis on communal values and hospitality in a more metaphorical sense. Likewise, Malay audiences may be more interested in the poem's broader themes of faith and spirituality.

The poetry of Surat Kapal reflects the cultural and religious identity of the Malay community in Rengat, Riau

The poetry of the ship's letter has many themes and messages that reflect the cultural and religious identity of the Malay people in Rengat when it was first written. The importance of faith and spirituality is one of the main themes of *Syair Surat Kapal*. This verse describes how the sailors on board put their trust in God to guide them safely to Mecca and emphasizes the importance of following the path of Islam. This theme shows the strong religious ties between the Malay people of Rengat, most of whom were Muslim when this poem was written. An important part of Rengat Malay culture is Islam, and this verse's emphasis on faith and belief will resonate deeply with the local population.

The importance of collaboration and cooperation is another theme that stands out in the *Syair Surat Kapal*. This verse shows how the ship's passengers work together to overcome the difficulties they encounter on their journey, emphasizing the importance of support and cooperation. This theme shows the communal values that are the basis of Malay culture in Rengat. Malays in Rengat live in small, close-knit communities, and they place great importance on cooperation and social interaction. Residents will resonate strongly with this verse that emphasizes community and solidarity. They will see these principles as central to their own cultural identity. In the *Syair Surat Kapal*, the theme of hospitality is also prominent; the ship's passengers are depicted as benevolent hosts, providing food and shelter for their fellow travelers. This theme shows how important hospitality is in Malay culture, where providing food and shelter for guests and visitors is considered an important part of social interaction. This

poem will resonate deeply with residents, as Malays are well known in Rengat.

One of the clear themes in the *Syair Surat Kapal* is the importance of education. This poem shows how the ship's passengers talk and debate about Islamic teachings and emphasizes how important it is to gain knowledge and wisdom. This theme shows how important the Rengat Malay community is to education and learning. At the time this poem was first composed, Rengat was a center of Islamic learning, and the local population placed great emphasis on the importance of gaining knowledge and understanding. Lastly, *Syair Surat Kapal* focuses on the theme of pilgrimage. The poem describes the ship's journey to Mecca and emphasizes the importance of performing the Hajj as an important part of the Islamic religion. The theme of this poem reflects the importance of pilgrimage in Malay culture, where making the pilgrimage to Mecca is considered an important part of religious life. The residents of Rengat would have been greatly affected by this poem's emphasis on this theme.

Modernization and changes in cultural and religious traditions in Rengat, Riau towards the performance of Poetry Surat Kapal

Modernization and globalization bring significant changes to various aspects of life, including cultural and religious traditions. In recent years, *Syair Surat Kapal* in Rengat, Riau has undergone significant changes in the form and format of performances. Modernization brought several changes that affected the performance of *Syair Surat Kapal*. One of the most significant changes is the change in performance media. In the past, the *Syair Surat Kapal* was performed live in front of the audience. Now, with advances in technology, these performances can be recorded and shared via social media or other online platforms. Another change is the change in show format. *Syair Surat Kapal* performance durations are increasingly shorter and structured to suit the preferences of modern audiences.

Changes in cultural and religious traditions also have an impact on the performance of *Syair Surat Kapal*. One of the impacts is a decline in the younger generation's interest in Riau

Malay oral traditions and culture. The lack of interest of the younger generation in Riau Malay culture has caused a decline in the number of viewers of *Syair Surat Kapal*. Shifts in society's values and beliefs also have an impact on the performance of *Syair Surat Kapal*. Modernization and globalization bring changes in society's values and beliefs, which can influence the interpretation and meaning of the *Syair Surat Kapal*. Although modernization and changes in tradition bring several challenges, there are several valid arguments that show that *Syair Surat Kapal* can remain relevant and sustainable. One of the arguments is cultural and religious values. The *Syair Surat Kapal* contains noble cultural and religious values, such as morality, spirituality and local wisdom. These values remain important and relevant in modern life.

Thus, modernization and changes in cultural and religious traditions have had an impact on the performance of *Syair Surat Kapal*. However, despite several challenges, the *Syair Surat Kapal* still has the potential to be preserved and adapted to the modern era. Creative and innovative preservation and adaptation efforts are needed to ensure that *Syair Surat Kapal* remains relevant and meaningful for society in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study found that *Syair Surat Kapal* transcends the realm of mere oral tradition, embodying a profound philosophy rooted in Islamic principles. This research unravels the meanings within this poem, shedding light on the philosophies pertaining to marriage, life and the human relationship with God. In the context of marriage, *Syair Surat Kapal* portrays it as a sacred journey imbued with profound significance. It emphasizes that marriage transcends the union of two individuals, encapsulating responsibility, devotion and commitment towards fostering a harmonious and blissful household. Regarding life's philosophy, the poems in *Syair Surat Kapal* are embedded with moral guidelines and advice on leading a fulfilling life. It underscores values such as patience, sincerity and gratitude as essential virtues in navigating life's challenges and difficulties.

Syair Surat Kapal serves as a constant reminder for humans to persistently worship God and surrender to His divine will. It posits that divine values and faith form the cornerstone of life and harmonious human relationships. Despite *Syair Surat Kapal* being an age-old oral tradition, its philosophy retains relevance in the context of contemporary life. The moral and spiritual values it espouses can serve as a compass for society in navigating the multifaceted challenges and complexities of modern life.

This research aspires to inspire future generations to preserve and rejuvenate this oral tradition, recognizing it as an integral part of their valuable cultural identity. It also invites researchers to further investigate on this literary work from various angles and perspectives.

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Informants

Winda Harniati, Speaker

Dr. Fatmahwati, M. Pd, BRIN

Dr. Elmustian, lecturer of Universitas Riau (UNRI)