



# Local Wisdom of Kerja Rani: A Study of Traditional Values and Human Ecology in the Batak Karo Protestant Church in Facing the Modern Ecological Crisis

Andi Brema Primsa Bangun<sup>1</sup>, Rahma Hayati Harahap<sup>1\*</sup>, Dony Saputra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Sumatra Rainforest Institute

Corresponding Author: [rahmashiny12@usu.ac.id](mailto:rahmashiny12@usu.ac.id)

## ARTICLE INFO

Received 24 January 2025

Revised 15 February 2025

Accepted 11 April 2025

Available online 7 May 2025

E-ISSN: 2962-1208

P-ISSN: 2807-3118

## How to cite:

Bangun ABP, Harahap RH, Saputra D. Local Wisdom of Kerja Rani: A Study of Traditional Values and Human Ecology in the Batak Karo Protestant Church in Facing the Modern Ecological Crisis. *Tradit Mod Humanit.* 2025;5(2):1–5.

## ABSTRACT

Kerja Rani is a harvest thanksgiving tradition in the Batak Karo Protestant Protestan (GBKP), reflecting the relationship between the congregation and nature. Although rooted in the agrarian culture of the Karo people, the practice has changed, especially among urban congregations. This research aims to identify ecological values in Kerja Rani and its relevance in the context of the current environmental crisis. Through a literature study, findings show that Kerja Rani can serve as a means to raise ecological awareness and strengthen human relationships with nature. GBKP has the opportunity to utilize this ritual in environmental education, inviting congregants to appreciate the role of nature and integrate sustainability values in daily life.

**Keywords:** Kerja Rani, Local wisdom, Social ecology

## ABSTRAK

*Kerja Rani merupakan tradisi syukur panen dalam Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP), yang mencerminkan hubungan antara jemaat dan alam. Meskipun berakar pada budaya agraris masyarakat Karo, praktiknya telah berubah, terutama di kalangan jemaat perkotaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi nilai-nilai ekologis dalam Kerja Rani dan relevansinya dalam konteks krisis lingkungan saat ini. Melalui studi literatur, temuan menunjukkan bahwa Kerja Rani dapat berfungsi sebagai sarana untuk meningkatkan kesadaran ekologis dan memperkuat hubungan manusia dengan alam. GBKP memiliki peluang untuk memanfaatkan ritual ini dalam pendidikan lingkungan, mengajak jemaat untuk menghargai peran alam dan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai keberlanjutan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari.*

**Kata Kunci:** Kerja Rani, Kearifan lokal, Ekologi sosial



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

<https://doi.org/10.32734/tmh.v5i2.19864>

## 1. Introduction

Kerja Rani is an important tradition within the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP), marking the congregation's gratitude for the harvest. This ritual originates from the agrarian culture of the Karo people, where they offer their best produce as a gift to God. However, as time has passed, both the form and meaning of Kerja Rani have evolved. Congregants who no longer work as farmers have started to offer other forms of offerings, such as money, yet the essence of the ritual remains focused on expressing gratitude for God's blessings.

In the context of growing awareness of environmental issues, the role of religious institutions in caring for nature has become increasingly relevant. Churches, including GBKP, are expected to contribute to environmental stewardship. Kerja Rani, as a ritual tied to nature and agricultural products, has the potential to teach the congregation about the importance of maintaining ecological balance. While previous studies have addressed changes in the practice of Kerja Rani, few have examined it from the perspective of human ecology, specifically how this ritual can inspire the congregation to become more environmentally conscious.

This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on how Kerja Rani can be utilized to raise the environmental awareness of the GBKP congregation. By exploring the local values embedded in the ritual, this research

seeks to provide guidance on how to reinterpret Kerja Rani in a modern context and turn it into a tool for the GBKP to play a more active role in environmental conservation.

The primary objective of this study is to understand how the traditional values within Kerja Rani can be applied to build ecological awareness among the GBKP congregation amidst the current ecological crisis.

## **2. Method**

In this study, the author employs a literature review method by analyzing sources, journals, and articles related to Kerja Rani and the local wisdom of the Karo people. Through a descriptive and analytical approach, this research aims to identify the meaning and values embedded in Kerja Rani and its relevance in the modern era. The method seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the contribution of Kerja Rani to ecological awareness within the Karo community and the GBKP congregation, while also revealing existing misconceptions about this ritual and its potential role in environmental conservation and the preservation of local wisdom.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **The Role of Kerja Rani as a Manifestation of Local Wisdom**

Kerja Rani is a significant tradition for the Karo people and the congregation of the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP). This tradition celebrates the harvest as an expression of gratitude to God. Additionally, Kerja Rani preserves local wisdom values that are integral to the cultural identity of the community. In each celebration, the community gathers their best agricultural produce to offer to God as a sign of thanksgiving for the abundance they have received (Aginta Angel, 2022).

Kerja Rani reflects a close relationship between humans, nature, and God. In this tradition, nature is not only seen as a source of life, but also as a partner in spirituality. The Karo people believe that the harvest is the result of collaboration between them and nature, which was created by God. In this sense, the harvest is not merely the outcome of human labor, but a blessing from God through the fertile land. The local wisdom of Kerja Rani underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between humans and nature. This tradition teaches respect for nature as an essential part of life. For example, in the celebration, there is a practice of allowing the land to rest after the harvest season. This is a sign that the Karo people recognize the vital role of nature in their lives—not only as a source of livelihood, but also as part of a larger system of life (Fransiska, 2019).

The values embedded in Kerja Rani remain highly relevant today, especially given the increasing environmental challenges faced by the world. In this context, Kerja Rani serves as a reminder that the relationship between humans and nature must be based on respect and responsibility. This is an important lesson in the present day, where many people often overlook the importance of caring for the environment. Through Kerja Rani, the church can encourage its congregation to become more conscious of the need to nurture the environment. By revisiting the meaning of this tradition, ways to live in harmony with nature can be rediscovered. Kerja Rani is not merely a ritual, but also a way to express gratitude to God and a commitment to protecting nature, which is an integral part of daily life. In this way, Kerja Rani retains its profound meaning and can serve as a guide for future generations in caring for the environment and valuing their relationship with God.

### **Transformation of Values in Kerja Rani**

Kerja Rani originally served as a tradition for the Karo people, who lived off agriculture. This ritual was performed as an expression of gratitude to God for the harvest, and it was deeply connected to the relationship between humans and nature (Aginta Angel, 2022). However, over time, the congregation of the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP), particularly those living in urban areas and no longer engaged in farming, began to experience changes in the practice of Kerja Rani. The majority of the congregation, now working as civil servants, lecturers, or businesspeople, started offering their salaries instead of agricultural produce (Fransiska, 2019). While harvested crops are still used symbolically, these offerings no longer come directly from the land that they cultivate. This shift reflects how Kerja Rani has adapted to the context of a congregation that is no longer reliant on agriculture.

This transformation in the form of offerings has affected the meaning of Kerja Rani. In the past, the harvest offering served as a reminder to the congregation of their connection with nature and their gratitude for the blessings received through the fruits of the earth. Today, with offerings now primarily focused on income, the connection to nature may not feel as strong as it once did. As mentioned earlier, the ecological values of Kerja Rani, which emphasize the importance of protecting nature, may be diminished. Nevertheless, the core values of Kerja Rani, such as gratitude to God and the sense of community among the congregation, remain intact, even though their form has changed. The challenge for GBKP is how to maintain awareness of the importance of caring for nature, even as the lives of its members have moved far from agricultural roots (Aginta Angel, 2022).

### **Ecological Sociology in the Practice of Kerja Rani**

The interaction between humans and the environment in Kerja Rani demonstrates that the harvest festival is not merely about celebrating the bounty but also about reflecting on the cycles of nature and the relationship between humans and the environment. Local wisdom plays a crucial role in maintaining ecosystem balance. In the context of Kerja Rani, this ritual can be understood as a way of preserving a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment, by expressing gratitude for the harvest received.

Another aspect of Kerja Rani is how the ritual can serve as a form of resistance against ecological injustice. As Afizal (MA, 2015) states, space is the habitat of an indigenous legal community, whether in rural or urban areas. For them, space is not only essential for residence and livelihood but also for fulfilling social and cultural needs. This perspective on indigenous communities emphasizes that space and the environment have a deeper significance, including spiritual and social dimensions. Kerja Rani, as a ritual involving the community in giving thanks for the harvest, can thus be seen as an effort to protect and maintain the environmental balance.

From a social and ecological standpoint, Kerja Rani functions as a medium that balances the life of the community. As (Susanti et al., 2023) note, another form of local wisdom practiced by the Karo people during the annual harvest ceremony involves the gathering of extended families from outside the village, promoting solidarity and cooperation in environmental stewardship. When performing the Kerja Rani ceremony, the Karo people not only celebrate the harvest but also strengthen social bonds and recognize the importance of environmental conservation. This shows that Kerja Rani has the potential to serve as a means of balancing social and ecological life.

Furthermore, Kerja Rani carries the meaning of harmony between nature and humanity. Agricultural products are not solely the result of human effort (human authority); they are also the outcome of the land, the environment, water, air, and other natural factors that support the success of the annual harvest. During the Kerja Rani celebration, the community also gives the land time to rest as an expression of gratitude for the agricultural yield. This reflects that Kerja Rani is not just a religious ritual, but a symbol of harmony between humans and the environment (Susanti et al., 2023).

Through this approach, Kerja Rani can function as a ritual that not only celebrates the harvest but also emphasizes the importance of preserving and conserving the environment. The integration of religious and ecological values in the ritual of thanksgiving for the harvest connects gratitude to God with the blessings derived from nature, stressing the need to maintain ecosystem balance (MA, 2015).

### **The Potential of Kerja Rani in Addressing the Ecological Crisis**

Kerja Rani, a harvest thanksgiving tradition in the Karo community and the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP), holds great potential to be revitalized and made more relevant in the face of the current global environmental crisis. Originally, Kerja Rani was celebrated as an expression of gratitude for the harvest, reflecting the close relationship between humans and nature. However, over time, its meaning has shifted and become more of a formality. In fact, this tradition can be re-developed with a stronger emphasis on the role of humans in maintaining environmental balance.

In confronting today's ecological challenges, Kerja Rani can be adapted as a concrete step by the church to remind the congregation of the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature. As stated in the church's documents, "the balance of nature and the balance of social life" are crucial. By aligning

Kerja Rani with values of sustainability, this local wisdom can become a means of raising community awareness about their role in preserving ecosystems. The church can revive the ecological meaning of Kerja Rani by encouraging its congregation to become more actively involved in environmental conservation. This local wisdom can be an opportunity to educate the community about the importance of preserving nature and how the environment plays a vital role in daily life. For example, the church could promote activities like reforestation, better waste management, or environmental campaigns that support sustainability. As (Syamsudin, 2017) states, communities with a heightened awareness of ecological issues should be more active in combating the environmental crisis. This means that the local wisdom of Kerja Rani could serve as a catalyst for local initiatives focused on environmental preservation.

Moreover, Kerja Rani can positively impact the environment through various actions, such as reducing waste and encouraging more community involvement in conservation activities. In this context, local wisdom not only becomes a ceremonial occasion but also serves as a reminder that nature is an essential part of life that must be protected, because the balance between nature and humanity is key to achieving sustainability (Syamsudin, 2017). In this way, Kerja Rani can become a tool for strengthening the bond between humans and nature, ensuring that this tradition remains relevant for both the present and the future.

With simple changes, Kerja Rani could once again serve as an effective tool for maintaining ecological balance and encouraging the community to care more deeply about the environment around them.

### **The Role of GBKP in Enhancing Ecological Awareness through Kerja Rani**

The Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP) has the opportunity to use Kerja Rani as a tool to raise ecological awareness among its congregation. Kerja Rani is not merely a harvest celebration; it can also serve as a moment for the congregation to reflect on their relationship with nature. In its original tradition, Kerja Rani was not only a form of gratitude to God but also a way for the Karo people to honor the environment that provided them with their harvests (E. Ginting, 2023). This ritual was a time when the congregation acknowledged that the land, water, and air play a vital role in their lives.

However, in reality, many members of the congregation today view Kerja Rani as just an annual ritual focused on offerings and worship. This has caused Kerja Rani to lose some of its ecological significance, which should emphasize that humans must live in harmony with nature, not just exploit it. GBKP has a great opportunity to reverse this trend by educating the congregation about the importance of caring for the environment. The church can use Kerja Rani as a moment to remind the congregation of their responsibility toward the environment. During the celebration, the church could incorporate messages about the importance of maintaining ecological balance and reducing the negative impact on the environment (Fransiska, 2019).

By revitalizing the ecological meaning of Kerja Rani, GBKP can help foster a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between humans and nature, encouraging sustainable practices within the congregation and the broader community.

### **4. Conclusion**

Conflict of Interest As a tradition of gratitude for the harvest in the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP), it has great potential to increase the ecological awareness of the congregation in the midst of the current crisis of environmental awareness. Despite the change from the offering of agricultural products to other income, the essence of this local wisdom remains relevant as an expression of gratitude to God and a reminder of the importance of maintaining a good relationship with nature.

This local wisdom reflects local values that teach respect for nature as an integral part of life. This research proposes that GBKP can utilize Kerja Rani to educate congregants about their responsibility to the environment, encourage conservation activities, and remind them of the importance of sustainability. Thus, Kerja Rani serves not only as a celebration, but also as a means to build awareness of the importance of maintaining ecosystems and respecting the relationship between humans and nature.

## References

- Aginta Angel. (2022). *MENGENAL Kerja Rani GBKP, Perayaan Membawa Hasil Panen Terbaik Sebagai Persembahan Ucapan Syukur*. <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2022/08/10/mengenal-kerja-rani-%09gbkp-%09>
- Fransiska, S. (2019). *Kajian Teologi Kontekstual Perubahan Bentuk Persembahan Kerja Rani di GBKP Runggun Yogyakarta*. Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana Salatiga.
- Ginting, E. (2023). Menelisik Konsep Eco-Peace Dalam Kerja Rani Bagi Revitalisasi Peran GBKP Merawat Alam. *Jurnal Teologi Praktika*, 4(2), 56–70. <https://doi.org/10.51465/jtp.v4i2.110>
- Ginting, K. B., Purwoko, A., & Simanjuntak, J. (2015). Kearifan Lokal Dalam Pengelolaan Hutan Di Desa Serdang Kecamatan Barusjahe, Kabupaten Karo. *Peronema Forestry Science Journal*, 4(4), 186–199.
- MA, A. (2015). KONTESTASI RUANG: TINJAUAN SOSIOLOGIS TERHADAP KEADILAN EKOLOGIS. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Mamangan*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.22202/mamangan.v1i1.87>
- Susanti, E., Patma, A. D., Asmaini, A., Sartika, D., & Radi, M. (2023). Tradisi Kerja Tahun: Nilai-nilai Pendidikan dalam Tradisi Kerja Tahun Budaya Karo Era Covid-19 di Desa Jeraya. *EDU SOCIETY: JURNAL PENDIDIKAN, ILMU SOSIAL DAN PENGABDIAN KEPADA MASYARAKAT*, 1(1), 149–156. <https://doi.org/10.56832/edu.v1i1.33>
- Syamsudin, M. (2017). KRISIS EKOLOGI GLOBAL DALAM PERSPEKTIF ISLAM. *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 11(2), 83. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v11i2.1353>