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Research Article

From Ritual to Community Learning: Islamic Educational Values and the Social Transformation of Mandi Safar in Gili Indah

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Abstract

Mandi Safar is a coastal tradition maintained by communities in Gili Indah, North Lombok, where inherited beliefs, Islamic religious interpretation, and international tourism intersect. This qualitative descriptive study examines how the tradition has been reinterpreted as a setting for community-based Islamic education and what its changing practices may mean for participation and social relations. The study draws on field observations, interviews with religious, customary, and community leaders, and documentary records, including a 2025 account from the village head. The findings identify continuity in collective prayer and sea-bathing practices alongside expanded public organization, religious explanation, cultural performances, and tourism-facing activities. Six educational values are articulated in the documented practices: deliberation, environmental responsibility, mutual assistance, social solidarity, gratitude, and prayer for safety. Their pedagogical relevance lies in participation, observation, and communal reflection rather than demonstrably measured learning outcomes. The analysis also identifies a distinction between participation and empowerment: although women and young people are mentioned among participants, the available evidence does not establish equitable decision-making or welfare effects. The study contributes a bounded account of how coastal cultural practice may function as informal religious learning while highlighting the need for more inclusive, environmentally responsible, and empirically evaluated governance.

Keywords: Mandi Safar; community-based Islamic education; intangible cultural heritage; social participation; cultural transformation; Gili Indah.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural traditions are living social practices through which communities transmit meanings, knowledge, norms, and forms of belonging. Their continuity is not simply a matter of repeating ancestral ceremonies: communities continually interpret inherited practices in response to religious change, mobility, new economic relationships, and the expectations of younger generations. Research on cultural tourism similarly shows that heritage may become a resource for collective identity while entering institutional and market arrangements that reshape its public presentation [1], [2]. This tension is pronounced in internationally visited coastal locations, where cultural practices are simultaneously meaningful to residents and visible to outsiders.

In Gili Indah, North Lombok, the Mandi Safar tradition is practiced across the island communities of Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air. Local accounts associate it with the historical settlement and maritime livelihoods of Bugis and Mandar ancestors, collective prayer for safety, and a bathing ritual conducted during Safar. Previous scholarship documented this tradition in precisely the same village, identifying its historical narrative, ceremonial phases, and educational values [3]. Studies of Mandi Safar elsewhere also show that local meanings differ by setting and that inherited rituals may be evaluated through multiple religious interpretations [4], [5]. Those earlier contributions make it especially important not to present basic descriptions of Gili Indah rituals as entirely new findings.

The educational significance of living heritage extends beyond formal curricula. Studies of museum-based heritage education, festival-based schooling, and educational tourism suggest that communities can provide opportunities for observation, situated practice, and intergenerational transmission when cultural practitioners retain a meaningful role [6], [7], [8]. Research on the intergenerational evolution of intangible heritage likewise suggests that tourism can influence how cultural knowledge is practiced and communicated [9]. In this sense, the question is not merely whether a ritual remains visible, but how its participants explain, learn, contest, and carry forward the values they associate with it.

Community festivals may also carry social implications. Cultural-development research links participatory arts and communal practice to opportunities for collaboration, negotiated representation, and community capacity, whereas festival-participation studies examine relationships with social capital and subjective well-being [10], [11]. However, such literature does not justify assuming that every cultural event produces the same outcomes. The relationship between heritage values and support for festivals is context-dependent [12], and involvement must be distinguished from influence over decisions, resources, and public narratives [13].

Questions of whose experiences count are central to a social interpretation of cultural preservation. Research documents women as bearers and transmitters of intangible heritage while also demonstrating that formal recognition does not guarantee equal power within safeguarding institutions [14], [15]. Tourism scholarship similarly distinguishes meaningful women-led initiatives from nominal inclusion, particularly where economic opportunities, leadership, and gendered social norms intersect [16], [17], [18]. Studies of role transitions and structural barriers further warn against treating women's participation as evidence of empowerment without examining access, agency, and benefits [19], [20]. For this reason, an

inclusive educational perspective requires attention not only to which groups are present at a tradition, but also to the roles they hold and the voices that are heard.

The Gili Indah field records include observations from 2024 and a 2025 interview with village head Wardana, alongside accounts from religious, community, and customary leaders. It describes a formerly relatively simple sequence of communal prayer and sea bathing, followed in later practice by more organized public activities, religious talks, cultural performances, and tourism-related engagement. Its recurring ritual components include the symbolic release of a sesangkek into the sea. These materials offer an empirical basis for interpreting changes in practice and stated meanings; they do not establish the prevalence of those interpretations, the number of participants adopting them, or quantified educational or welfare outcomes.

Tourism adds further complexity. Research in developing-country destinations has documented limits to community participation in planning and in stakeholder perceptions of empowerment [21], while work on rural tourism identifies both empowering and disempowering pathways [22], [23]. Heritage authenticity and local identity need not align automatically with tourism promotion [24], [25]. Consequently, the educational reorientation of Mandi Safar should be examined as a negotiated social process rather than an uncomplicated transition from "traditional" to "modern."

Against this background, the present study examines how the documented meanings, organization, and activities of Mandi Safar have been reinterpreted in Gili Indah and considers the Islamic educational values communicated through those practices. It also assesses, at a descriptive and interpretive level, the opportunities and limits of community participation in a tourism-oriented environment. Its contribution is an interpretive account of informal learning, inclusion, and community governance surrounding the ceremony, rather than an unsupported claim of improved women's well-being. The central inquiry is how Mandi Safar's documented practices can be understood as an informal educational setting and what limitations constrain claims about its wider social effects.

METHODS

Research design and setting

The research used a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the changing meaning and implementation of Mandi Safar in Gili Indah Village, Pemenang District, North Lombok Regency, Indonesia. The descriptive orientation is appropriate to reconstructing reported practices and local interpretations without claiming statistical representativeness or causal effects. Gili Indah comprises the island communities of Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air, which the original account describes as alternating the event location. The analysis is limited to the documented interviews, observations, and materials; no additional fieldwork or respondents are reported.

Participants, sources, and collection

The study identifies religious leaders, customary leaders, and community leaders as purposively selected informants because of their familiarity with the tradition; it also

specifically cites a 2025 interview with Wardana, the village head. Evidence was gathered through observation, interviews, and documentary analysis, with preliminary observation reported for 2024. The available records do not specify interview counts, interview protocols or durations, verbatim transcripts, or a documentary register. Accordingly, these details are neither inferred nor replaced by invented figures. Purposive sampling is established in qualitative research, but a transparent selection rationale remains important [26].

Analytic strategy and credibility

The reported thematic procedure involved data condensation, data display, and interpretation of recurring patterns. The analysis addresses four domains: origins and continuity, changes in ceremonial organization, religious and educational reinterpretation, and implications for community participation. The account is compared with prior conceptual and empirical research without attributing unreported coding categories or intercoder statistics to the researchers. Thematic analysis benefits from explicit conceptual choices and transparent links between source evidence and interpretation [27], [28]. Studies of trustworthiness and saturation similarly emphasize the importance of reporting what investigators actually did rather than asserting unverified audit trails, data saturation, or triangulation outcomes [29], [30], [31].

Ethical and evidentiary boundaries

The study records do not specify an ethics-approval identifier, the form of informed consent, or conditions governing access to interview material. These reporting gaps require author clarification and do not, by themselves, demonstrate that ethical safeguards were absent. Verbatim interview quotations cannot be presented without access to transcripts. Likewise, statements about participation by women, young people, and local enterprises are retained only only at the level supported by available field accounts. Claims about measured learning gains, household income, leadership distribution, or changes in subjective well-being cannot be made from this dataset.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Cultural origins and continuity in a coastal setting

The accounts of religious, customary, and community leaders associate the local practice of Mandi Safar with Bugis and Mandar ancestors whose lives were linked to sailing and fishing. Community members reportedly regarded Safar as a period associated with misfortune and undertook collective prayer and bathing as an expression of the wish for safety, particularly at sea. The historical narrative is significant as local memory, but it is not independent archival proof of the tradition's date of origin or a uniform belief shared by all residents.

According to the 2025 account attributed to village head Wardana, earlier observances involved gathering at homes or mosques for communal prayer and proceeding to the beach for bathing. Before bathing, a religious leader wrote prayers on a leaf or board and released the object into the water. Some participants sought the object and subsequently placed it in a well or bathing area so household members could share in the symbolic practice. These details show

the importance of collective worship, material symbolism, and the link between communal events and household life in the account preserved by the authors.

Reorganization of practice and public engagement

In the more recent ceremony, community deliberation shapes the venue, timing, financing, and implementation. Religious and customary leaders, community representatives, and residents participate in preparatory discussions. The activities expand to public addresses following selakaran, dhikr, and communal prayers, together with performances and activities intended to introduce Gili Indah's tourism potential. As summarized in Table 1, these changes suggest more visible organization, although the available evidence cannot date each change or quantify participation.

The documented Melarung Sesangkek ceremony involves a specially prepared vessel, often resembling a miniature fishing boat, containing fruits, white, red, and yellow porridge, roasted chicken, live chickens, and other symbolic items. Customary leaders, religious figures, residents, and invited guests release it into the sea; some participants may then seek the offering before communal bathing. Interview-based interpretations characterize the objects as expressions of gratitude for local resources. Because interpretations can differ, this meaning should not be presented as unanimous.

Table 1. Original evidence retained and its permissible interpretation

Evidence source	Documented content	Interpretive boundary
2024 preliminary observation	Event reported to rotate among Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air.	Not a quantified historical or participation trend.
2025 interview with Wardana	Earlier practice included prayer, written prayers on leaf/board, sea bathing, and household reuse of the material.	One identified interview account; no invented quotations.
Interviews with local leaders	Bugis/Mandar maritime ancestry and earlier Safar-related concerns for safety.	Oral accounts, not independent archival confirmation.
Observation and interview synthesis	Deliberation, speeches, prayers, Melarung Sesangkek, performances, and tourism-related activities.	Sequence and themes reported; frequencies unknown.
Reported participation	Religious/customary/community leaders, youth, women, local officials, and visitors mentioned in the article.	No demographic counts or decision-power measures.

Religious reinterpretation and informal Islamic education

Field accounts indicate that religious teachers increasingly deliver explanations concerning the Islamic understanding of Safar, prayer, reliance on Allah (tawakkul), and the distinction between normative Islamic teaching and the belief that bathing itself can ward off calamity. Collective supplication, discussion, performances of hadrah, readings of mawlid texts, and children's competitions are described as educational activities accompanying the event. The

relevant change is therefore not the elimination of inherited cultural practice but the addition of interpretive and pedagogical framing. Comparative research on Mandi Safar in other Indonesian communities similarly identifies the use of cultural communication to negotiate ritual meaning [5].

The reported educational content consists of deliberation (shura), environmental responsibility, mutual assistance (ta'awun), social solidarity (ukhuwah), gratitude (shukr), and prayer for safety. Table 2 summarizes these practices as opportunities for participation and explanation, not as evidence of measurable learning outcomes. The idea that heritage practices can become learning sites is supported by scholarship on heritage education and community-based cultural transmission [6], [7], but the present evidence does not allow claims that participants' beliefs or behaviour changed in measurable ways.

Table 2. Documented transformation of Mandi Safar and its educational reading

Dimension	Earlier/reported continuity	Contemporary description	Educational or social interpretation
Religious meaning	Protection from perceived Safar-related misfortune; communal prayer.	Explanation of tawakkul and rejection of automatic ritual efficacy.	Opportunity for reflection on religious interpretation.
Ceremony	Prayer, written symbolic material, sea bathing.	Continued prayer and bathing with sesangkek and public programming.	Cultural continuity alongside explicit discussion of meanings.
Organization	Relatively simple local gathering.	Deliberation over location, finance, roles, and guests.	Practical learning about shared responsibility and consultation.
Public outreach	Primarily local ritual participation.	Speeches, hadrah, mawlid readings, competitions, tourism presentation.	Broader channels for informal learning and cultural communication.
Participation	Community networks and religious leadership.	Reports mention women, youth, officials, visitors, small businesses.	Presence does not demonstrate equitable influence or welfare.

Educational values and environmental tensions

Shura is expressed in preparatory meetings that determine the event's practical arrangements; ta'awun appears in shared cleaning, logistics, and assistance; and ukhuwah is reinforced through gathering, prayer, and participation. Gratitude is articulated through prayer and the reported symbolism of natural produce, while safety-related supplications carry particular significance in a maritime community. Environmental responsibility is described through collective beach preparation and cleaning. Table 3 links the practices to educational opportunities rather than measured long-term internalization.

An important tension emerges between environmental teaching and releasing symbolic objects and offerings into the sea. The source includes both accounts: people clean the coast

and also perform Melarung Sesangkek. An ecologically responsible reading therefore requires assessing materials, retrieval practices, and waste impacts rather than declaring the ceremony environmentally sustainable without measurement. Participatory conservation literature emphasizes meaningful community involvement in defining and assessing such practices [32].

Table 3. Islamic educational values mapped to the original reported practices

Value	Practice reported	Potential learning process	Evidence not available
Shura	Collective discussion of location, funds, and programme.	Consultation and shared decision-making.	Who speaks or controls final decisions by gender/age.
Ta'awun	Joint cleaning, preparation, transport, and assistance.	Learning cooperation through doing.	Participation frequency or behavioural change.
Ukhuwah	Prayer, gathering, shared ritual, and interaction.	Belonging and reciprocal recognition.	Validated measures of cohesion or inclusion.
Shukr	Prayer and symbolic recognition of coastal resources.	Reflection on gratitude and responsible use.	Individual learning outcomes.
Tawakkul	Prayers for safety and religious talks.	Distinguishing supplication from claimed ritual causation.	Pre/post changes in theological understanding.
Coastal care	Reported beach cleaning before festivities.	Practical care for coastal environment.	Ecological assessment of offerings and waste.



Figure 1. Analytical account of continuity and reinterpretation (not a causal or chronological estimate).

Discussion

From ritual persistence to pedagogical reinterpretation

The most defensible account of change in Gili Indah is one of layered meaning: familiar ceremonial activities remain, while religious explanations and educational activities are added. Figure 1 illustrates how ritual continuity and reinterpretation operate together. This interpretation is consistent with heritage scholarship that treats cultural meaning as negotiated

by practitioners rather than fixed permanently by the earliest documented ritual form [9], [12]. The present case adds a specific Islamic educational vocabulary—tawakkul, shura, ta'awun, ukhuwah, and shukr—to the conversation about informal learning through cultural practices.

The transformation should not be described as a complete conversion from an "incorrect" ritual to a universally accepted educational activity. The field accounts include beliefs about misfortune, descriptions of contemporary religious talks, and continued use of symbolic offerings. These elements may coexist and may be understood differently by individuals. Scholarship on heritage ritual experience and cultural representation warns that the same symbolic actions can acquire distinct meanings for practitioners and observers [33], [34]. The educational function of Mandi Safar therefore depends on explanation, dialogue, and participants' interpretations, not simply on programme labels.

Participation, social relations, and the limits of empowerment claims

The organization of Mandi Safar through deliberation and shared preparation provides potential conditions for relational learning. Similar research has shown that cultural programmes can create contexts for collective action and ownership [10], and that community festival participation is associated with social connectedness in other settings [11]. Nevertheless, the presence of a committee or a large public gathering is not itself evidence of equal access to decisions. Participation can range from attendance and voluntary labour to agenda-setting, resource control, and leadership [13], [22].

This distinction is particularly important in the gender dimension. The interviews mention women and young people among participants, but it does not identify the proportion of women among organizers, whose proposals were adopted, whether childcare or scheduling shaped participation, or whether any economic opportunities were equitably distributed. In comparative tourism studies, women's roles in entrepreneurship, leadership, and cultural safeguarding are often conditioned by wider social structures [16], [17], [18], [19]. Women's participation in Gili Indah should therefore be treated as a line of inquiry opened by the current findings, not an already verified outcome of empowerment.

The relationship between community-based cultural activity and welfare is equally conditional. The accounts mention potential involvement of tourism operators, micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, and local arts groups, but offers no income data, employment records, distributional analysis, or before-and-after indicators. Studies of tourism-related empowerment and pro-poor income distribution show why participation and benefit distribution must be analytically separated [35], [36], [37], [38], [39]. Without comparable evidence, this article can discuss potential welfare pathways but cannot calculate or assert welfare improvement.

Tourism-facing identity and cultural ownership

The increasing visibility of Mandi Safar to visitors creates opportunities for cultural communication and potential economic participation. Yet a ritual's value to residents cannot be reduced to visitor appeal. Tourism research has identified tensions around authenticity, identity, community resistance, intermediary organizations, and local authority over the meaning of heritage [24], [40], [41]. The appropriate question is therefore whether community

participants can determine how and for whom the tradition is presented, and whether educational goals remain intelligible to local participants when programmes become more tourism-oriented.

Additional studies of digital heritage initiatives and younger generations show that visibility, participation, and transmission can expand beyond physical ceremony spaces [42], [43]. However, digital strategies were not examined in the Gili Indah fieldwork; they are possible directions for future participatory educational programming, not activities claimed by the present study. A similar caution applies to women's use of digital tools in cultural preservation, which has been explored elsewhere but is not substantiated for this event [44].

Community education, religious moderation, and environmental accountability

In the material examined, public sermons and explanations about prayer and tawakkul provide an identifiable pedagogical channel through which religious interpretation is communicated. Such communication may support respectful discussion between local customary practice and Islamic teaching, but it does not establish that participants have adopted a single interpretation. Nor can the presence of international tourists be taken as evidence of improved interreligious tolerance without information about interactions and participants' experiences. This distinction preserves the contribution of cultural preaching while avoiding unsupported claims about the magnitude of its effect [5], [45].

The reported values of environmental stewardship and coastal solidarity deserve particular attention in Gili Indah because the sea is simultaneously a source of livelihood, a ritual setting, and a tourism resource. The juxtaposition of beach cleaning with releasing offerings into the water is not merely a logistical detail; it signals the possibility of disagreement between the ecological and symbolic interpretations of the same event. Comparative research on locally driven cultural safeguarding and participatory conservation supports incorporating residents' knowledge into decisions about materials and environmental effects [32], [46]. Environmental impact data are unavailable; any redesign should be developed with the community and evaluated before its benefits are claimed.

Implications and an evidence-sensitive framework

For educational practice, the recorded ceremony suggests a feasible structure for non-formal learning: preparation can address deliberation and collective responsibility; religious talks can invite critical explanation of tradition and tawakkul; cultural performances can support intergenerational communication; and post-event reflection can address coastal waste and cooperative ethics. Research on school–community partnerships and heritage learning provides a comparative basis for this approach [6], [7], [8]. This is an evidence-informed proposal derived from documented activities, not a programme shown to have been implemented and evaluated in Gili Indah.

Table 4 outlines a research agenda for inclusive event governance: document speaking roles, committee membership, women's and young people's decision-making influence, opportunities for local livelihoods, and the accessibility and safety of activities. Research on safeguarding women's heritage practices, gender-sensitive tourism, and residents' empowerment reinforces the importance of evaluating these dimensions rather than assuming inclusion from attendance alone [14], [15], [20], [47].

Table 4. Evidence-sensitive directions for practice and subsequent research

Area	Possible action (not a reported intervention)	Evidence needed to assess outcomes
Informal education	Link explanations of Safar, prayer, and local history to participatory reflection.	Short learning reflections or interviews before and after events.
Gender and youth inclusion	Audit committee participation, speaking opportunities, and role allocation.	Gender- and age-disaggregated accounts of agency and safety.
Community welfare	Clarify local vendor, artist, and household economic roles.	Livelihood narratives and benefit distribution data.
Environmental responsibility	Co-design environmentally safe symbols and post-event clean-up.	Material inventory, retrieval tracking, shoreline observations.
Cultural ownership	Use community-led decisions on visitor communication and documentation.	Participant perspectives on authenticity, dignity, and consent.

Taken together, the study supports a bounded but meaningful conclusion: Mandi Safar presents occasions for the communication of Islamic values and the negotiation of coastal identity through a collectively organized tradition. The material does not yet show that such occasions generate measurable learning, equitable empowerment, or welfare improvement. That distinction strengthens rather than weakens the integrity of the interpretation, because it makes explicit the difference between the tradition's documented practices, plausible educational processes, and social outcomes that future research must test.

CONCLUSION

The Mandi Safar tradition in Gili Indah reflects continuity and reinterpretation within a coastal Muslim community. Interviews and observations describe inherited prayer and sea-bathing practices associated with maritime safety, together with more publicly organized events involving deliberation, religious explanation, cultural performances, a sesangkek ceremony, and tourism-facing activities. The findings identify six educational values—shura, environmental responsibility, ta'awun, ukhuwah, shukr, and prayer for safety—whose practical expression makes the ceremony a potential setting for community-based Islamic learning. The most defensible contribution is to clarify how religious meaning and informal educational opportunity are articulated within a continuing cultural tradition. The evidence also reveals unresolved questions about the distribution of voice and benefits, especially for women and young people, and about the ecological implications of offerings released into the sea. Consequently, the study recommends examining inclusivity, environmental safeguards, and learning outcomes directly before claiming broader social welfare effects.

LIMITATIONS

The study draws on a single qualitative case and does not support statistical generalization. The study reports interviews, observations, and document analysis but does not specify complete participant counts, interview protocols, verbatim quotations, the documentary corpus, and a detailed analytic audit trail. Accounts of origin depend on local oral testimony, while descriptions of change do not establish a precise chronology. No gender-disaggregated participation data, learning assessments, income measures, or ecological evaluations are available. Consequently, the analysis cannot establish causal impacts on religious understanding, inclusion, social cohesion, economic welfare, or environmental quality. Comparative and longitudinal research that documents diverse community perspectives, including those of women and younger residents, would be necessary to evaluate these questions.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

A.Z. Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and writing—original draft. R.U. Literature review, data organization, validation, interpretation, and writing—review and editing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

ChatGPT assisted with language editing, structural refinement, and reference organization. Responsibility for the accuracy of the content, citations, and interpretations, and for approval of the final manuscript, rests with the authors.

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