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# Debata Kase-Kase as The Foundation for The Existence of The Pakpak Community

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**Abstract.** This article talks about Debata Kase-kase, the result of field research on the highest divinity on which the existence of the Pakpak community is based. The Pakpak people, like most of the world's people, place divinity at the foundation of their existence. This truth is reflected in various rituals and symbols in the Pakpak culture, which document the experience of the revelatory Pakpak ancestors in reality. The research uses a qualitative approach. Data was collected through interviews with traditional leaders as well as in-depth observations of traditional rituals and symbolic objects in the Pakpak community. The collected data was analysed using the circle pattern of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics. The results of data analysis show that the Pakpak people believe that the entire cosmos is surrounded by divine power. These forces are centred on a single power, Debata Kase-kase, as the supreme divinity and therefore the foundation of existence. Pakpak's traditional beliefs can be classified as natural monism.

**Keywords:** Debata Kase-Kase, Pakpak, Community.

## 1 Introduction

Religious humans always place God as the foundation of existence. The term existence refers to what Karl Jaspers conveys as true existence or authenticity [1]. For religious humans, existence can only be achieved in a relationship with God, so that every existence is directly directed to God, *Jede existenz ist unmittelbar zu Gott* [2]. Author of [3], said that such awareness has permeated humans since the beginning. Found that archaic people have a belief that everything in the universe, including the most physical actions, can have power when there is a divine presence or intervention [4]. The same realisation occurs in modern people. Spinoza, one of the modern philosophers, said that God is the basic substance, which is the source of all that exists and the foundation of existence [5]. Many tribes place divinity, or the "Transcendent," as the basis for building morality. Various forms of politeness, virtue, and virtue in traditional tribes are often based on the will of the divine. Immanuel Kant said that God is the basis for building morality [5]. The same thought was also conveyed by Paul Tillich, a modern philosopher and theologian. Tillich asserts that God is the basis of existence. "God is something in my life that astounds, excites, and overwhelms me" [6].

The problem that arises is that the God who is introduced to the members of the Indonesian Church is a western-faced God [7]. The image of God in the Christian faith does originate in Arab-Jewish culture but has long been developed in western philosophical concepts. The God presented by western missionaries is a philosophical God, as depicted in the Catechism of the Church and other Christian theological books. Such a face of God, although still received with great respect, is foreign to the local congregation. The congregation must believe in God with a face that is foreign to their own culture. The impact is even more severe: the presence of God's face in western structures renders the presence of God's face in traditional faith superstition, and all forms of respect for Him are declared heretical [8]. Faith in God seems to uproot the congregation from its own cultural roots.

The church, as stated by the Asian Bishops in the FABC I session in Taipei, 1974, emphasised that the authenticity of faith only occurs when it gets a form from the nation's own culture [9]. In its decree *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council acknowledged that sacred truths that illuminate human life can be found in various religions and non-Christian cultures [10]. The Church values all that is true and holy in various faiths and respectfully contemplates those which, though different, reflect the rays of truth, which illuminate all people [11]. The Church believes that God is involved in everything, thus causing various nations to have an awareness of the mystery of God in supernatural powers, which are present in the course of history and events in human life. There is even an acknowledgment of the supreme divine power that permeates the lives of nations with deep religious zeal, manifested in various thoughts and symbols, revealing the mysteries of God in myths, philosophies, and treading the divine path through asceticism and contemplation; who realises the limitations of the world and seeks the perfect path of liberation through supreme enlightenment; also in various teachings, rules, and sacred rituals [11].

The positive attitude of the Church shows that divine truth in various cultures is also of value to the Christian faith. The truths in local culture not only enrich the Church with various forms of expression but also the substance of faith. This fact calls on the Indonesian Christian Church to explore divine truths, including the face of God in various Indonesian cultures [1]. God had worked in various local cultures before the presence of the Church. The excavation of divine truth in the cultures of the archipelago will bring the Church into an encounter with the elements of God's face, presence, and work, thereby deepening her understanding of the mystery of God and enriching her faith with various forms of expression of faith [12]. This discovery will allow the Indonesian Christian Congregation to see and appreciate the face of God in their own culture. The Christian faith also became more Indonesian [13].

This paper discusses the face of God in Pakpak culture, which is documented in various cultural objects. The study cannot reach all cultural objects. This paper raises five main objects in Pakpak culture, namely *caban*, *Mejan*, *klembis*, *mendegger uruk*, and *menkicik*. The basic question to be answered in this paper is: what are the dimensions or divine faces that are documented in these various cultural objects? The study collected data by interviewing traditional leaders in Salak and Pakpak Bharat, collecting documents, and observing traditional rituals. The data collected was analysed using the hermeneutic circle technique, where the parts explain the whole and the whole explains the parts [14].

## 2 Method

The research uses a qualitative approach. The use of this approach is based on considerations, as stated by Kaelan, that the research orientation is on revealing the meaning of natural situations because they require more interpretation than calculating numbers. The study collected data by interviewing traditional leaders in Salak, Pakpak Bharat, collecting documents and observing the traditional rituals of the Salah community, Pakpak Bharat. The collected data was analysed using Paul Ricoeur's circle hermeneutic technique, in which the parts or elements explain the whole and the whole explains the parts (The Truth That Saves: The Apostle Paul's Ideas About God's Truth in the Bible). The whole referred to includes historical context, culture, cosmology, and so on. The results of the analysis are then described as research findings and conclusions are drawn..

## 3 Result And Discussion

### 3.1 God in a Symbol

God, as said by [15], on the one hand, has transcendence because it is at an infinite distance, as if hidden, so that it is not accessible to the human mind, which is controlled by boundaries, limits, categories, and dichotomies. God cannot be formulated into certain categories or formulated into a predicate [2]. God, as [15] said, is *das Umgreifende alles umgreifenden*, the "encompassing" everything that surrounds as well as underlies and sustains all reality [4]. God, on the other hand, has an immanent dimension that places Him in the universe and allows Him to participate in the dynamics of human life. God's revelation occurs naturally in all realities.

Natural revelation causes God to reveal himself and take part in everything, thus making everything have an element of divinity [16]. The dimension of revelation in reality, of course, is not because of the objectivity of reality but because it is placed as a symbol that represents God. Natural revelation, which [15] author calls God's first language, is always personal, subjective, and unique [17]. This trait makes the experience of revelation unable to be described in speculative, rational language [18]. The experience of revelation can only be translated into various symbols, which then become cultural objects, such as myths, arts, norms, values, customary systems, kinship systems, mantras, rituals, dances, sacred objects, holy verses, and so on [2]. Cultural objects, according to [15], document the experience of natural revelation in order to be understood and accepted by society, and [19] said as the second language of revelation. The second language of revelation, although it cannot be said to reach all the depths of the experience of natural revelation, still represents the elements of divinity presented through the object [18]. Every movement of understanding towards divinity must read cultural objects to reveal the divine elements documented in this language [2].

### 3.2. Caban Symbolism

As far as it can be observed, *Caban* is a cultural object that is prominently lived as a symbol of the *Kase-Kase Debata*. The *caban* is at the top of the ridge of the traditional house, right in the middle of the roof of the traditional house. The term *caban* refers to the shape of this object, which resembles a cup. *Caban*, for the Pakpak community, has a symbolic meaning. Boang Manalu (in interview 27 July 2022) said that the *caban* is a symbol of the highest divinity,

*Debata kase-kase*. The location at the top of the ridge of the traditional house illustrates the position of *Debata Kase-kase* as the highest divinity. The house, in most traditional societies, is not just a place to live but a picture of the cosmos [20]. Pakpak cosmology is indeed a paradox because, on the one hand, it adheres to the pattern of five rice farming communities [21], but on the other hand, it also implies a pattern of three farming communities [22]. The basic structure of a traditional house does show a three-pattern, but the roof formulation is more like a five-pattern. The roof of traditional houses, apart from the debate about Pakpak cosmological patterns, always depicts the world above [7]. The symbolism of the roof as the world above is more assertive in the triple pattern [23]. Parallel roofs with upstream rivers in the pattern of five rice field communities [21]. The roof area in traditional society is considered the residence of divine beings. *Debate Kese-Kase* was at the top of the upper world. The position at the peak describes the height that extends beyond the entire cosmos [24].

The depiction of the heights of *Debata Kase-kase*, although not entirely, seems to parallel the paintings of *Debata kase-kase* in the Karo Batak and *Mulajadi Nabolon* in the Toba Batak. Keo tribe [25]. Previous research on the dimension of revelation in Keo Tengah, Flores found similar symbolism to describe the highest divinity, *Nggae Mbapo* [17]. The *naro pije pu'u Peo* ritual mentions the presence of a black cat perched, *meu mumu*, on top of *sa'o en'nda* [26]. This symbolism aims to describe the existence of *Ngga'e Mabpo* at a height, beyond the entire cosmos, with amazing authority [1]. An analysis of the symbolism of the *caban* found a peculiarity in the Pakpak community's appreciation of the *Debata Kase-kase*. The symbolism of the *caban* depicts an accessible divinity. Even though the stakes are high, case debates are still affordable. Ronika Tindaon (in an interview on July 27, 2022) said that the Pakpak community, in an emergency situation, puts something in a *caban* to be used as medicine or just as an intention to apply. The Pakpak community, said Tindaon, believed that all intentions by using the media that were placed in the *caban* would be granted. Every house that has a *caban* is therefore believed to have protection, avoiding the disturbance of evil creatures and dangers.

This usage shows that the symbolism of the *caban* refers to a divinity that is powerful, gracious, and affordable [8]. The question that arises is, what are the *caban* elements that can represent the *Debata Kase-kase*? The *Debata Kase-kase*, as the highest divinity, is attached to the celestial phenomena that reveal immense power, immeasurable immensity and immensity, infinite perfection [16]. These characteristics are not found in the *caban*. The placement of various objects and intentions on the *caban* shows that this object acts more as a medium of communication with the highest divinity. Appreciation of the protective power of the *caban* leads this object to the divinity that is near and accompanies life [17]. The affordability of the *caban* excludes this object from representing the highest divinity. The supreme divinity is attached to the depths and vastness of mysteries that are not fully understood. Keeping the *caban* in its place as a symbol of *Debata Kase-kase* means destroying this supreme divine mystery's depths and vastness.

The hollows and circles of the *caban* can indeed represent the divine depth and breadth that reaches all things, but other aspects of divinity are not found in the *caban*. Symbols cannot reach all the elements of divinity, but after all, a symbol must be able to describe the basic characteristics of the entity it represents [27]. The symbol of divinity must represent the elements of divinity. *Caban*, referring to this argument, cannot possibly represent a supreme divinity. *Caban* is synonymous with a container that accommodates all people's expectations as well as an outpouring of divine blessings. *Caban* is more likely to act as a medium of

communication. This object parallels the *peo* and *mangu* in the Keo people, who act as the pillars of communication with the highest divinity [27].

### 3.3. Mejan Symbolism

The Pakpak community also has a *mejan*, which is interpreted as a symbol of the divine presence. This object is a stone that contains carvings of various symbols. The most prominent symbol elements on the *mejan* look like the figures of a man and a woman riding a horse [28] and [29]. *Mejan*, in ancient times, were owned by noble people, such as tribal chiefs and rich people [30]. This is because making a *mejan* requires a large amount of time and money. The making of the *mejan* requires a lot of rituals to give it mystical power. Anggara Manik (in an interview on September 19, 2019) said that many mantras are chanted to fill the *mejan* with *nangguru* or ancestral spirits. In the past, the Pakpak people used the *mejan* as a fortress of defense. It is said that the *mejan* is believed to make a sound if an enemy wants to enter a village. *Mejan* will also cry out if bad things happen to the village community. The sound that comes out of the *mejan* is believed to come from the *nangguru* or ancestral spirit, who lives at the *mejan*.

The Pakpak people place the *mejan* as a place of refuge, and as a guarantee of prosperity. The carvings on the *mejan* are believed to bring prosperity and well-being. *Mejan*, for the Pakpak people, are not ordinary stones, but objects that represent divine power in the cosmos. The appreciation of the *mejan* as the residence of the *nangguru* refers to the ancestors as divinity in the cosmic space. *Nangguru*, in many traditional cultures, is not lived as a single and absolute divinity [31]. *Nangguru*, because death is transformed into a divine being, takes part in the highest divinity, *Debata Kase-kase*, which because of its relational closeness to the next generation, becomes a divine force that accompanies and blesses life [5].

### 3.4. The *Klembis* Ritual – Symbolism of Salvation

*Klembis* is another element in Pakpak culture that shows a dimension of revelation. *Klembis* is a safety ritual for babies. The core of the *klembis* ritual is the provision of food, mostly in the form of chicken meat, accompanied by a prayer for salvation. This ritual culminates in rubbing the *klembis*, or "*ikat ayam*", the part of the meat between the wings and the chest, on the baby's forehead while offering a prayer of safety to be kept away from harm. The use of *ikat ayam* refers to the Pakpak tradition of using chicken as the main dish, which is also used in many traditional ceremonies.

Rituals with chicken dishes belong to the category of small customs. *Klembis* falls into this category. All rituals in this category are called *males bulung buluh*, which means ritual with chicken side dishes [32]. Apart from *klembis*, this category includes feeding certain parties with special intentions, and thanksgiving. Chickens in this category of ritual are not always slaughtered and processed into side dishes. Boang Manalu (in an interview on October 19, 2019) said that in certain rituals, chickens are handed over alive.

This level is certainly different from the ritual of marriage and death. Both of these rituals fall into the category of *males bulung sampula*, or rituals using pork as the main dish [33]. These rituals belong to the moderate category. The Pakpak community, as stated by Luster Berutu (in an interview on September 17, 2019), still recognises the highest level, the traditional *males bulung simbernaek*. Included in this ritual is digging the bones of ancestors. The level of this

ritual is marked by the slaughter of a buffalo as the main sacrificial animal. The term "*males bulung simbernaek*" refers to the buffalo being the main victim [32]. All rituals, at all levels, seem to point to *klembis* as a point of meaning. All rituals in the Pakpak community, at all levels, are directed at safety as the main meaning.

### 3.5. The *Menkicik* Ritual

The *menkicik* ritual, as stated by Anggara Manik (in an interview on October 21, 2019), is usually reserved for people who have just had an accident. This ritual is performed with rice being put in a *baka* (a type of woven rice holder). *Baka* containing rice is placed on the head of the accident victim, followed by the words "*kicik kicik kicik, pihir pe nasi en pihiren den mo tendimu*" and added prayers and hopes. The rice that is placed in the *baka* becomes an instrument of prayer for the supplicant, both in the context of joy (as an expression of gratitude) and sorrow (as a request). The Pakpak community believes that in the event of an accident or shocking event, the spirit or soul of the victim experiences a shock, so that it weakens and can cause illness [34]. *Kicik-kicik* rituals are carried out for the sake of restoring the soul's strength of the victim so as not to cause greater danger.

### 3.6. *Mendegger Uruk* Ritual

The term *mendegger uruk* refers to the thanksgiving ceremony and offering. This ritual is carried out by the community under the leadership of the land king when the economy and agricultural products decline [35]. The decline in agricultural output results in reduced welfare and is often accompanied by a decrease in social solidarity. This ritual involves many parties, such as indigenous communities, traditional leaders, *berru* (bride's family), *senina* and *puang* parties. The ritual begins with a welcome, followed by a prayer led by the shaman.

*"Ale pung beraspati ni tanoh, tanggung nikuta, jandi namora, berru sondang, naga lae dekket datu sitermurmur beggeken mo sodip pengidon nami en. ale pung. Enggo mo mbue simasa ibagasen sindekah en, enggo mo mbue perukkilen i tengah-tengah nami en. Ale pung ntah mbue pe sisalah sini bahan nami, si oda selloh i tengen kene pung, mbue pengidon nami pung asa sesa moi asa makin mi majuna kami karina pinepparmu, asa makin mi domna perezekin nami"* [35].

(O ruler of the fields, and also ruler of the universe, hear our prayers and supplications. A lot of bad things have happened to us over the past few years. O Lord of the fields, we may have made so many mistakes, which do not sound good to you, if possible we hope that you will forgive us so that all of our descendants will be more prosperous, so that our sustenance will increase.)

Pakpak people call this figure *memaingken sodip mi sumangen (tendi) si enggo mate* [36]. The *sibaso* figure comes from the *puang* who has the charisma to communicate with the rulers of the supernatural world, predicting the future. *Sibaso* is often a reference to the obligations and rights of citizens, including in the implementation of ceremonies, social relations, and cultivation.

The ritual of *mendegger uruk* is followed by the stabbing of the *jerreten* (pole) where the victim's buffalo is tied (*menambatken*), which begins by going around the hole where the *jeretten* pole is stuck seven times. After the *pole* is plugged in, the buffalo are herded to be

tethered to the *jereten* pole. The *Berru takal peggu*, followed by the whole family and then dancing to *gendang gajah mangiring*, surrounds the victim's buffalo, and ends with the spearing of the buffalo by the *berru takal peggu* on the seventh counting. The *mendegger uruk* ritual, which is about nature, is followed by a *sibaso* prayer to bless and give out rice seed (*padi tumpar*) to the community [35].

The targets of the *mendegger uruk* ritual is directed at the divinity that rules the field. Most farming communities are not familiar with a special figure as a god. The term "lord of the field" does cause confusion. What is meant by the ruler of the field? The open space of cultivation makes farmers look up more, namely at the ruler of the sky as a source of rain and heat that determines the fate of agriculture [23]. The title ruler of the fields, as stated by Anggara Manik (in an interview on October 19, 2019), most likely refers to *Debata Kase-kase*, as the ruler of the universe and the determinant of the seasons, which brings rain and heat, fertility and prosperity [36]. The Pakpak community did not directly mention the *Debata Kase-kase*. This is due to respect for the highest divinity [5]. The title "lord of the fields" refers to the divine power of *Debata Kase-kase* which covers the entire territory of the cosmos, dominates the fields, and blesses life.

### **3.7. The Transcendence and Immanence of *Debate Kase-kase***

Various objects and rituals of Pakpak culture show the two sides of *Debata Kase-kase* divinity. The *Debate kase-kase*, at one point, shows transcendence. The *Debata Kase-kase* is a high divinity, is in the infinite distance, because it is barely reachable. The symbolism of *wajan* (wok) depicts the transcendent divinity of *Debata Kase-kase*, with its awesomeness, omnipotence and omniscience manifested through celestial phenomena [1]. The frying pan that opens upwards points to the sky with all the phenomena that manifest awesomeness and infinity. The *wajan* circle also shows unlimited breadth.

The *Debate Kase-kase* on the other hand, is a near divinity, accompanying and involved in life. The symbolism of *wajan*, *Debata Kase-kase* not only displays a high and terrible divinity, but also takes part in human life. The role of the wok as a healing vessel and a medium of supplication to *Debata Kase-kase* shows that the highest divinity has an immensity dimension. Even though it is far away, it brings healing power and various blessings to humans. The affordability of *Debata Kase-kase* are mainly presented in *klembis rituals*, *menkicik*, and *mendegger uruk*. The ritual of *mendegger uruk* seems to show the divinity of *Debata Kase-kase* which envelops the entire cosmos with a life-giving divine power [17] and [37]. *Debata Kase-kase*, in the understanding of the Pakpak people, it is a life-giving divinity, or rather the source of life. This appreciation is emphasised by the *klembis* and *menkicik* rituals, which emphasise the safety or soteriological aspects.

### **3.8. Merciful Divinity**

The symbolism of *Debata Kase-kase* divinity in various objects and rituals in the Pakpak community, apart from transcendence and immanence, always displays a merciful divinity. The *Debata Kase-kase*, in transcendence, are a merciful divinity, because of which a branch is provided to accommodate the intentions of the people as well as the outpouring of divine grace. All ritual movements, such as *mendegger uruk*, *klembis*, *menkicik* display the symbolism of the



grace of life. *Debate Kase-kase*, in the Pakpak community, are the basic source and grace of life.

## 4 Conclusion

The whole discussion of the symbolism of *Debate Kase-kase* divinity points to the conclusion that *Debate Kase-kase* is a transcendent and immanent divinity, the basic source and giver of the grace of life. This appreciation shows that it is in harmony with the core of the Christian faith, and various other religions and beliefs. This reality shows that every form of belief, including the most primitive one, at the most basic level contains universal truths about the divine, even though the cosmological and socio-cultural contexts express it with different symbols and languages. This truth demands an openness of faith, and in a spirit of humility a dialogue with others of different faiths, religions and cultures. Openness and dialogue will enrich the faithful through encounters with various elements of divinity displayed by other communities, which often provide light to further explore God's mysteries and gain a stronger foundation for existence.

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