

Gastronomic Analysis of Uyah Asem as a Traditional Culinary of Osing Tribe in Kemiren Village

Pingkan Dwi Lestari¹, Achmad Gilang Ariyanto², Fradila Cindi Riawan³, Nissa Nurhaliza⁴

International Relations, Social and Political Science Faculty, Jember University¹⁻²

Email: pingkanlestari099@gmail.com

Abstract

Kemiren is one of the villages rich in cultural diversity in Banyuwangi Regency. This diversity is reflected in its traditional culinary offerings, particularly Uyah Asem, a dish from the Osing Banyuwangi tribe that dates back to the 1950s. Uyah Asem features a distinct flavor profile dominated by a fresh, sour, salty, and slightly spicy taste. The name "Uyah Asem" comes from the saltiness and freshness of the spices used. For the Osing Banyuwangi people, this dish holds historical significance and cultural meaning. This paper aims to explore the gastronomic aspects of Uyah Asem as a traditional culinary dish of the Osing tribe in Kemiren Village, Banyuwangi. Gastronomy studies the history, philosophical meaning, and cultural context behind each dish, including Uyah Asem. Through this lens, gastronomy highlights Banyuwangi Regency as a unique cultural region represented by Osing cuisine. The research uses a qualitative approach, collecting data through interviews with Kemiren's Osing villagers and literature studies for additional information. The scope focuses on the traditional village of Kemiren, where the majority of Banyuwangi's Osing tribe lives. The interviews provide insights into the cultural significance of Uyah Asem, which the author analyzes from a gastronomic perspective. The findings reveal that Uyah Asem is more than just a dish; it symbolizes kinship and the hard-working spirit of the Osing Banyuwangi people. It carries a cultural message about fostering a civilized community, rooted in the values passed down from ancestors, to sustain family and community bonds.

Keywords: Uyah Asem, Gastronomic, Kemiren Village.

A. INTRODUCTION

Every country in the world has aspects that are used to increase their income or image, including Indonesia. One aspect that can be used to increase the country's image and opinion is through tourism. Tourism is an important economic sector that covers various aspects, from natural, cultural, to culinary visits, which play a crucial role in improving the economy and strengthening a country's identity (Yulliana, 2021). The tourism sector in Indonesia is growing rapidly due to support from various aspects such as natural diversity, culture, and unique culinary traditions. Based on data from the *Travel and Tourism Development Index* (TTDI), released by the *World Economic Forum* (WEF) on 21 May 2024, Indonesia has managed to move up 10 places in global tourism competitiveness, from 32nd to 22nd. This achievement is clear evidence that Indonesian tourism continues to experience significant growth and is increasingly competitive in the international arena. Indonesia's success in improving its global tourism competitiveness position cannot be separated from the existence of tourism in each city. One of the cities in Indonesia that has become the best tourism icon is Banyuwangi.

Banyuwangi is a city located in East Java province. Banyuwangi is famous for its tourist destinations. Referring to BeritaBwi data in 2016, Banyuwangi Regency managed to become one of the 10 districts or cities with the highest ranking regarding the Indonesian Tourism Index. The assessment was carried out by the Ministry of Tourism with reference to the *Travel and Tourism*

Competitive Index from the *World Economic Forum*. Besides being famous for its tourist destinations, Banyuwangi is also famous for its culinary tourism. Literally, the term *culinary* comes from the English word “culinary” which means something related to cooking. Meanwhile, culinary tourism is a tourist activity that is carried out with the aim of tasting the culinary specialties of a particular region. Culinary is one of the components of the tourism industry that is effective in increasing the *branding* of an area. This is because culinary can be an attraction of a destination from an area. One of the famous culinary specialties in Banyuwangi comes from the Osing tribe or the original Banyuwangi tribe, namely Uyah Asem.

Uyah Asem or famously known as Ayam Kesrut is one of the culinary specialties in Banyuwangi, apart from Pecel Pitik or Rujak Soto. Uyah Asem is a processed soup made from young native chicken. In addition, this culinary has simple seasonings such as shallots, garlic, kecombrang, ranti tomatoes, and belimbing wuluh. Therefore, Uyah Asem culinary is famous for its distinctive blend of flavors such as spicy, sour, and fresh. This culinary is called ‘Uyah Asem’ because historically the Osing people from Kemiren never bought food ingredients, the majority of them only bought salt because they had all the ingredients in their own garden (Handoko et al, 2019). In addition, the Banyuwangi Government once held the Banyuwangi Culinary Festival or Bakul with Uyah Asem as the main food. At the festival, there were 200 participants consisting of chefs and housewives. In addition, the festival also invited Farah Quinn as the main guest star. Therefore, Uyah Asem became more popular with various tourists, both local and international.

Referring to the arguments above, it can be said that Uyah Asem culinary is rich in history or philosophy, food uniqueness, and culture. Therefore, the author can take a problem about ‘How are the food elements, history, and cultural uniqueness of Uyah Asem?’. Thus, to analyse the problem, the author uses the concept of the Gastronomic Triangle or Indonesian Gastronomy. According to Messakh and *Indonesia Ministry of Tourism* (2017), the concept of the gastronomic triangle as a whole is unique and interesting because it discusses the elements of a tourist destination. The main elements in this concept are food, culture, and history. Thus, the food, history, and culture of Uyah Asem are the main focus of this research.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. According to Lexy J. Moleong, the qualitative approach refers to the understanding of phenomena related to what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions expressed in the form of descriptions such as words, language, and not numbers (Moleong, 2000, p. 12). The author uses primary data collection techniques in this research, namely by using observation methods and also direct interviews to understand the gastronomic meaning of Uyah Asem, a typical culinary of the Osing tribe in Kemiren Village, Banyuwangi. Data were collected through observations and interviews, then analyzed thematically to identify patterns of ingredients, cooking techniques, and symbolic meanings associated with Uyah Asem in the traditions of the Osing tribe. Instruments used included a semi-structured interview guide, a voice recorder and field notes. The village was chosen because it is the cultural center of the Osing tribe that still maintains their culinary traditions and customs, making it an authentic source to study Uyah Asem. In addition, the research subjects were selectively chosen based on their knowledge of the history, manufacturing process, and traditional values to provide complete data or information in writing this research.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ayam Kesorut or more commonly known by the indigenous people of Kemiren Village in Banyuwangi as Uyah Asem, is a traditional dish that has endured through generations. Based on an interview conducted on Sunday, October 6, 2024, an informant stated that Uyah Asem is very popular among the local community and is a favorite dish for many. This dish is cherished not only for its fresh taste but also for its simplicity in preparation. It is no surprise that Uyah Asem has become a staple dish in Kemiren Village. Uyah Asem can be easily made using simple ingredients. According to the informant, even someone who is not skilled at cooking can easily prepare it. The main ingredients used to make Uyah Asem include:

1. Free-range chicken
2. Salt
3. Whole cayenne peppers
4. Wuluh starfruit
5. A little sugar
6. Kecombrang, known locally as "Lucu"
7. Wadung, a fruit similar to Duku, used for its sour skin
8. A type of tomato referred to locally as "Ranti"
9. Side vegetables such as long beans and moringa leaves

One of the unique aspects of Uyah Asem is the use of natural ingredients readily available in the surrounding environment. The Osing community, known for its simple lifestyle and reliance on nature, finds these ingredients easily around the village. The simplicity of Uyah Asem reflects the Osing people's close relationship with nature, as well as the spirit of togetherness and mutual cooperation that characterizes their community. Uyah Asem is more than just food; it is a symbol of tradition and social bonds. This dish is often served during community gatherings as a manifestation of unity and solidarity among the villagers. The long history of Ayam Kesorut or Uyah Asem makes it a dish that brings warmth and fosters a sense of togetherness. Additionally, the simplicity of the ingredients and the fresh taste make it the perfect dish to enjoy together.

Although times have changed, the authenticity of Ayam Kesorut or Uyah Asem has been preserved to this day. One example is the use of free-range chicken as the main ingredient. Although broiler chicken is easier to find and more affordable, the residents of Kemiren Village still prefer free-range chicken. The reason is the difference in taste; broiler chicken is considered to produce a more greasy flavor and can diminish the distinctive freshness of Uyah Asem. The use of free-range chicken, which is more natural, maintains the fresh and authentic taste of this dish. This traditional dish not only becomes a source of pride for the Osing people but also stands as a living testament to the rich cultural values that have been passed down through generations. Uyah Asem exemplifies how the Osing community appreciates simplicity, mutual cooperation, and a close connection with nature in their daily lives.

Uyah Asem in the Indonesian Gastronomic Triangle: Ingredients, Techniques, and Culture

Besides that, ayam kesrut or uyah asem culinary can be analyzed in the concept of the Indonesian gastronomic triangle. The Indonesian gastronomic triangle is a concept that connects three main elements in Indonesian cuisine: local food ingredients, processing techniques, and cultural meaning. These three elements interact to form the richness of traditional Indonesian cuisine. Below is an analysis of the text above based on the concept of the Indonesian gastronomic triangle:

1. Local Food Ingredients

The text highlights the significant role of natural ingredients that are abundant in the environment of Kemiren Village, Banyuwangi, and their essential contribution to the authenticity of Uyah Asem. The Osing community is known for its deep connection to the land and nature, which is evident in their choice of ingredients. Essential components such as free-range chicken, wuluh starfruit, kecombrang (commonly called “Lucu” by locals), wadung, and the local tomato variety known as “Ranti” are not merely selected for their taste but for their cultural and environmental value (Handoko, 2019).. Free-range chicken is particularly favored because it has a firmer texture and a richer flavor compared to broiler chicken, reflecting the community's preference for natural, minimally processed food. This choice underscores the emphasis on using ingredients that align with their traditional culinary practices, prioritizing health and taste.

Wuluh starfruit and kecombrang are used to infuse the dish with a distinctive sourness and aroma, enhancing the flavor profile of Uyah Asem without the need for artificial additives. The use of wadung, a fruit with a sour skin, and the “Ranti” tomato adds unique layers of acidity and freshness to the dish, distinguishing it from other regional specialties. The reliance on local ingredients not only preserves the unique taste of Uyah Asem but also promotes environmental sustainability. By using what nature provides around them, the Osing people maintain an eco-friendly approach to their diet. This practice helps sustain local biodiversity and supports a farming culture that is less dependent on imported goods and modern agricultural chemicals. The community's connection to these local resources embodies a harmonious relationship with their surroundings and emphasizes sustainable living.

2. Processing Techniques

Uyah Asem is prepared using simple yet effective traditional techniques that have been passed down through generations within the Osing community. This preparation process embodies the wisdom and culinary heritage of the village, where practicality and the preservation of natural flavors are paramount. Unlike complex modern cooking methods that may involve heavy seasoning or elaborate steps, Uyah Asem’s preparation is straightforward, allowing the natural taste of its ingredients to shine through. The preparation begins with the selection of fresh, high-quality free-range chicken, which is then boiled with wuluh starfruit and kecombrang. This boiling technique is critical as it extracts the essence of the ingredients, creating a broth that is rich in natural flavors and nutrients.

The use of boiling as the primary cooking method ensures that the vitamins and minerals are retained, contributing to a nutritious and healthful dish. The addition of whole cayenne peppers during the process lends a subtle heat that complements the sour notes, balancing the overall taste without overpowering it. This method reflects the Osing people’s practical approach to cooking, where meals are designed to be nourishing and uncomplicated. The simplicity of the technique also makes Uyah Asem accessible to all, even those who may not be skilled in culinary arts. This accessibility is an integral part of its cultural significance, reinforcing the communal aspect of cooking and sharing food within the community.

3. Cultural Meaning

Uyah Asem holds profound cultural value for the Osing community that goes beyond its function as a meal. It is a dish steeped in tradition, symbolizing the spirit of togetherness, mutual assistance, and social cohesion that characterizes the Osing people. The practice of serving Uyah

Asem during communal gatherings, such as gotong royong (mutual aid activities) or village events, underlines its role as more than just sustenance—it acts as a culinary representation of solidarity and kinship. The shared preparation and consumption of Uyah Asem during such events foster a sense of unity among the community members. It is during these gatherings that stories are exchanged, bonds are strengthened, and collective identity is celebrated.

The dish, therefore, becomes a symbol of shared heritage, reminding the Osing people of their roots and the values passed down through generations. This culinary tradition also highlights the importance of gotong royong, a fundamental cultural principle that promotes cooperation and mutual support. Uyah Asem encapsulates the Osing community's way of life, where food is a medium for expressing identity and celebrating life together. The simplicity and communal nature of Uyah Asem align with the broader cultural values of the community, emphasizing modesty, gratitude for nature's bounty, and collective effort. The dish serves as a testament to how traditional foods can reinforce cultural bonds and continue to thrive as cherished parts of cultural heritage even in the face of modernity.

Uyah Asem's enduring role within the Osing community highlights the resilience of traditional culinary practices, especially in the face of rapid modernization and globalization. While dietary habits across Indonesia increasingly lean toward convenient, industrially produced foods, the Osing community has remained committed to Uyah Asem's traditional ingredients and preparation methods. This includes the preference for free-range chicken over mass-produced poultry, a choice rooted in preserving Uyah Asem's authentic taste and texture. Free-range chicken, with its firmer texture and richer flavor, is seen as essential to achieving the intended quality of the dish, as it retains the fresh, less oily taste that Uyah Asem is known for. By maintaining such traditional practices, the Osing people protect not only the distinctive flavor of Uyah Asem but also a way of life that values sustainability and cultural continuity. This culinary resilience preserves the authenticity of the Osing community's food culture, ensuring that their heritage remains vibrant and accessible to future generations.

Uyah Asem has also become a key cultural asset for Banyuwangi's local economy and tourism industry. As Banyuwangi continues to attract tourists with its natural beauty and rich culture, traditional dishes like Uyah Asem offer visitors a deeper connection to the area's heritage. Kemiren Village, where Uyah Asem is commonly served, draws those interested in experiencing Osing traditions firsthand. Uyah Asem plays a central role in this cultural experience, as tourists are not only introduced to its unique flavors but also the history and traditions that surround it. This culinary tourism brings economic benefits to local residents, creating opportunities for small businesses to thrive and enhancing the visibility of Osing culture within Indonesia and beyond. The economic impact of Uyah Asem underscores its value as more than just a meal; it is a cultural ambassador that fosters understanding, appreciation, and economic support for the Osing community's heritage.

D. CONCLUSION

Indonesia, like many countries around the world, have some aspects which would increase the income such as through tourism and traditional culinary. This aspects could be seen in one of many cities in Indonesia in East Java, Banyuwangi. In this city, specifically Osing Tribe in Kemiren Village of Banyuwangi, have some traditional food with deep historical and philosophical roots. One of that traditional food is Uyah Asem or Ayam Kesrut. This delicious food is one of special food that is involved intensely in many event of Osing Tribe since ancient time, such as celebratory event after Gotong Royong or kinship. Beside the historical root, Uyah Asem also have philosophical

meaning which symbolized hard working spirit and bond between people of Osing Tribe. Made with wild chicken or free-range one, pepper, Wuluh starfruit, Kecombrang, Wadung, and veggies, Uyah Asem is served freshly. With the easy-to-find ingredients to make it, this simple food make way through people's heart and mind, which is gastronomically described as delicious and unique food. Within the gastronomy perspective, the cultural core of Uyah Asem could be seen to represents the spirit of togetherness that the Osing people carried within their blood as part of the customs. Thus, Uyah Asem as part of gastronomy is not just a mere food but more of a food with deep historical, cultural, and philosophical background.

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