

# The Practices of Nasi Ambeng Among Modern Javanese Community in Malaysia

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## Abstract

The intermingling of the Javanese and Malay cultures through assimilation, acculturation, and cross-cultural marriages has given rise to the emergence of the Javanese-Malay population. Over time, this population has evolved into a distinct Malay sub-ethnic group in Malaysia, undergoing various adaptations and adoptions, including their culinary traditions. However, there is a limited empirical understanding of the extent to which Javanese traditional food, particularly Nasi Ambeng, is practiced within this community, thus this scholarly investigation strives to actively foster and enrich present-day knowledge and profound perspectives, with a specific focus on advancing the realm of Malay gastronomic studies. To address this gap, this study employs ethnographic and netnographic approaches to investigate the contemporary practices of serving Nasi Ambeng. In order to obtain an exhaustive and comprehensive dataset, purposive sampling was employed, specifically targeting the concentrated Javanese-Malay population residing in specific regions of Johor and Selangor. The findings shed light on the fact that the modern Javanese in Malaysia have expanded the scope of Nasi Ambeng beyond its traditional role in feasts and ceremonial activities. It is revealed that Nasi Ambeng is also commonly served for family consumption and during business-related engagements. Through this research, it becomes evident that the preservation and perpetuation of traditional foods like Nasi Ambeng rely heavily on the practices of the community, irrespective of any adaptations made to align with the evolving needs and progress of the wider society.

## Keywords:

Malay traditional food, Nasi Ambeng, Javanese ethnic, Food practice

## 1 Introduction

Traditional foods are considered not only a way of life but also a reflection of history and cultural identity. According to Bertozzi (1998), these foods represent the culture and individuals of a specific region. Sharif et al. (2016) further emphasize the importance of preserving traditional foods as cultural heritage, as they signify the identity of a particular community. This perspective aligns with Noor et al. (2013), who argue that every country has its own distinct traditional foods associated with specific ethnic groups. Consequently, culture, race, and ethnicity are intrinsically linked to traditional foods and culinary practices (Reddy & van Dam, 2020).

Weichselbaum et al. (2009) posit that the continuity of traditional foods relies on the transmission of knowledge and food practices across generations. For example, Rahman et al. (2018) highlight that the richness of traditional foods in Malaysia stems from the diverse races and ethnic groups within the country. Moreover, the development of Malay traditional foods can be traced back to the 13th century, influenced by Thailand and Indonesia, as noted by Brissenden (2003). To ensure the ongoing practice of serving Malay traditional foods, the involvement of younger generations plays a crucial role (Muhammad, Zahari, & Sharif, 2013). Therefore, the knowledge of traditional foods must be actively shared and passed down through continuous practice between younger and older generations within the community (Muhammad et al., 2015; Saad et al., 2021).

Nasi Ambeng has traditionally been served and consumed by the Javanese-Malay community in Malaysia during various occasions and feasts, such as *kenduri slametan* (prayer ceremony), *kenduri arwah* (ancestral ritual), and *kenduri tahlil* or *yaasin* (religious gatherings). Given the scarcity of empirical studies on Nasi Ambeng practices, this paper aims to investigate the current practice of serving Nasi Ambeng among the Javanese-Malay community in Malaysia, as reflected in the research objectives and research question of this study (see Table 1).

Table 1: Research Objective and Research Question

| Research Objective  | Research Question  |
|---|--|
| To investigate the current practices of Nasi Ambeng among Javanese community in Malaysia. | How Nasi Ambeng is currently being practiced among Javanese community in Malaysia? |

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Javanese-Malay in Malaysia

According to Miyazaki (2000), the term 'Javanese-Malay' is used to specify the legal status of the Javanese as residents of Malaya. Due to their strong cultural roots originating from Java, they are referred to as 'orang jawa' by the Malays, distinguishing them from Indonesians or immigrants from other parts of Indonesia who arrived after the formation of the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore, Java, not Indonesia, is the ancestral home of the Javanese-Malay people. Between 1891 and 1901, Bahrin (1967) states that 70 percent of the Indonesian population in the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlement consisted of the Javanese community, with men outnumbering women.

Despite the significant number of Javanese-Malay people, Javanese is considered a sub-ethnic group within Malay society in Malaysia, whereas in Indonesia, Javanese and Malay are distinct ethnicities (Sekimoto, 1988). Their categorization as a sub-category is latent and covert (Miyazaki, 2000), resulting in their classification as Malay ethnic groups. They enjoy equal privileges under the government's *bumiputera* (native) policy. The Javanese and Malays share similarities, such as practicing Islam as their religion (Ong, 1990), although scholars like Connors (2008) argue that not all Javanese in Indonesia practice Islam, as a significant number of Muslim Javanese hold traditional beliefs influenced by Hindu-Buddhist culture from India.

However, Miyazaki (2000) highlights many similarities between the Malays and the Javanese in Batu Pahat, Johor. The Javanese and Malays are considered 'migrants of similarity,' but when compared to the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia, they are seen as 'migrants of difference' due to their distinct cultural backgrounds. The Javanese easily integrate into Malay society in Malaysia due to the close linguistic and cultural proximity, as well as the shared Islamic background. There is a significant concentration of Javanese and Bugis descendants, particularly in the rural areas of Batu Pahat, Johor (Miyazaki, 2000). Most of them originate from Ponorogo, East Java. The Bugis and Javanese communities settle in coastal areas and primarily work in palm plantations. However, some reside in the hinterlands and engage in rubber plantation work, as Javanese laborers were brought in by the British colonial government during the emergence of the rubber industry from 1911 to 1930.

### 2.2 Nasi Ambeng

*Rewang* and *lek-lek-an* are examples of Javanese customs and cultural traditions that are still practiced in Malaysia. *Lek-lek-an*, one of the oldest traditions, involves Javanese staying up late at night to celebrate an occasion and revel in serendipity (Ferawati et al., 2015). This event incorporates *Marhaban* and *Makan Nasi Ambeng*. *Marhaban* encompasses Islamic chanting accompanied by instrumental music, such as *kompang*, tambourines, and percussion drums, as a devotion to Prophet Muhammad

(PBUH). *Makan Nasi Ambeng* follows the performance, where the signature Javanese dish is enjoyed. Nasi Ambeng is served on a large tray, comprising a generous portion of white rice and side dishes like black soy-sauced chicken, *mi goreng jawa*, and *serondeng kelapa* (sweet and spicy coconut floss). The Nasi Ambeng is shared among three to four people, symbolizing the strength of their relationships and fostering a sense of sharing and togetherness.

The Javanese value system differs significantly from that of other ethnic groups in the Indonesian archipelago due to their strong sense of community and ethnic solidarity, which hold great importance in various aspects (Jandra et al., 2016). This outlook is evident in their diverse range of social activities and rituals, such as *rewang* (wedding preparation), *sunatan* (circumcision), *lenggang perut* (a ceremony for expecting mothers in their seventh month of pregnancy to facilitate childbirth), *slametan* (salvation), and *punggahan* (tradition of offering prayers to the deceased before Ramadan). These cultural ceremonies often involve the consumption of Nasi Ambeng, also known as *Nasi Berkat*. The term "*berkat*" in *Nasi Berkat* literally translates to blessings, signifying the blessings bestowed during the ceremony (Likin, 2009). Nasi Ambeng is also individually packed for relatives, invited guests, individuals who provide *kirim sumbang* (financial contributions) due to their inability to attend the ceremony, and those who assisted with *rewang*, allowing them to bring it home for their wives and children.

### 2.3 Food Practice

Plastow et al. (2015) define food practices as activities that involve food, from its preparation to consumption, which are influenced by specific cultural and ethnic behaviors. Since food is an integral part of our daily lives and social relationships, it is evident that food practices not only fulfill basic human needs but also represent a community in a particular region. In addition, food practices are historically, socially, and culturally entrenched in our daily lives, transcending nutrient intake (Beardsworth & Keil, 2002).

Firstly, food is interconnected with social interactions, as it is often consumed together with family and friends, promoting communication and interaction among them (Neely et al., 2014). Raji et al. (2017) add that food practices allow for social interrelation in matrimonial or wedding ceremonies involving collective activities, such as cooking preparation, food serving, and consumption. Food practices in ceremonies, especially those conducted in kampongs or villages, are essentially regarded as communal activities as they involve numerous people working together to successfully run the ceremonies. This eventually reinforces social connections between families, friends, and relatives. The task divisions during food preparation and meal consumption also consolidate social bonds as food practices involve the element of exchange and sharing (Neely et al., 2014). Therefore, food practices act as a vital instrument for social connection.

Even though the Malays in several villages in several states of Peninsular Malaysia still maintain and practice their traditional beliefs, knowledge, and life events (Manderson, 1981), many have forgotten the cooking techniques and practices passed down by their ancestors. This is supported by Nor et al. (2012), who state that the practice of Malay traditional foods has been ignored by the younger generations due to the emergence of convenience food consumption and fast transition. Unlimited access to information technology has also had a significant impact on food intake and practices. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in consumers desiring and trying new foods, such as freeze-dried ready meals (Galanakis et al., 2021), which have escalated the production of non-perishable and processed foods, increasing their demand over the next few years (Askew, 2020). Furthermore, Ismail et al. (2022) state that the younger generation's spending pattern in Malaysia during COVID-19 has changed, with them spending more on food and transport.

Sharif (2018) identifies four pillars that hold the pertinence of traditional food practices: convenience ingredients, modern equipment, convenience food products, and pre-processed foods. He further contends that factors such as technological advancement, modernization, income, lifestyle, and education also influence food practices because they lead to changes that are paralleled with the current era's development. This guides several parties, such as food producers, retailers, and manufacturers of food equipment, to make useful improvements. Consequently, the changes made would have a significant impact on how people, especially the younger generation, regard and practice serving traditional foods.

However, traditional food practices are still relevant because traditional food knowledge transmission is linked with other elements (Sharif, 2018). By using convenience ingredients, modern equipment, pre-processed foods, and convenience food products, the practice and preparation of traditional foods can be maintained as these elements accelerate cooking activities due to their efficiency and functionality (Sharif, 2018). However, the authenticity of traditional foods must be preserved, regardless of modernity or new elements that are infused into food practice and preparation.

### **3 Methodology**

The method used for information gathering in the current study was qualitative, employing an ethnographic approach and a netnographic approach to investigate the current practice of serving Nasi Ambeng among the Javanese community in several districts of Johor and Selangor, including Tangkak, Muar, Kuala Selangor, and Sabak Bernam.

The primary research instrument in this study was observation, which is a continuous and ongoing activity. The use of this instrument helped capture the perspective of the participants being observed (Nurani, 2008). The ethnographic

approach was employed for the observation process, which lasted for two weeks, five to six hours a day, to explore the current practices of Nasi Ambeng in the identified locations. Additionally, the netnographic approach was adopted to observe online postings and social media content that highlight Nasi Ambeng (Fetterman, 2019).

Furthermore, pen and paper were used to document the details of the observation, including the individuals observed and engaged with, the events and routines that took place, and the activities carried out by the participants within the settings. In addition to written records, visual, audio, and/or video recordings of online activities were also included (Fetterman, 2019). Still pictures were particularly useful in this study as they allowed for capturing images, documenting individuals, and keeping track of locations, events, and settings. This information enabled the researcher to maintain photographic records of specific behaviors or activities. Therefore, the data collection methods served as evidence to support and complement the observations, with still pictures documenting events during the observation.

The data and information obtained were analyzed using narrative analysis. This approach facilitated the construction of stories based on the data gathered from fieldwork, written notes, still pictures, and online observations, all of which were aligned with the research question addressed. Through narrative analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the current practice of serving Nasi Ambeng among the Javanese community in Malaysia was developed.

## **4 Findings**

This section provides an explicit documentation of the analysis of the data and information gathered regarding the current practice of serving Nasi Ambeng among the Javanese community in Malaysia. The results from the conducted observational studies reveal that the current serving practice of Nasi Ambeng can be categorized into three main practices: feasts, family consumption, and business activities.

### **4.1 Feast or *Kenduri***

In the Javanese community, feasts or *kenduri* are organized with the intention of expressing gratitude to Allah through prayers. The most common feasts observed, particularly in the Javanese-Malay society in Malaysia, are *tahlil* or *kenduri tahlil arwah* (a ritual for the deceased) and salvation feast or *kenduri slametan*. *Kenduri tahlil arwah* is a religious ritual where prayers are offered for the deceased. It is usually led by an imam and attended by men in the village. *Kenduri tahlil* typically involves supplication and the recitation of *Surah Yaasin* to ease the journey of the deceased in *alam barzakh* (a realm that separates the living from the dead) and the afterlife. It is commonly held for three consecutive days after someone's passing, as well as on the seventh, fortieth, hundredth night, and one year after their death. On the other hand, *kenduri slametan* is held to seek protection from future misfortunes such as physical and mental illness,

sadness, and troubles. Births, house movings, and marriages are among the important occasions where *kenduri slametan* is commonly performed.

During these feasts, the host provides food and beverages for the participants. In line with the long-standing Javanese tradition, the host typically serves Nasi Ambeng as the main dish, accompanied by additional foods such as *kuih* (traditional cakes) and fruits. Initially, Nasi Ambeng was served in a tray lined with a banana leaf, with rice on top, covered again with a round-cut banana leaf called *samer*, and all the dishes like quartered *ayam masak kicap* (chicken cooked in soy sauce), *sambal goreng jawa* (Javanese-style chili paste), *mi goreng* (fried noodles), *serondeng* (sweet and spicy coconut floss), *tumpi kacang dhal* (crispy lentil fritters), fried salted fish, and sliced cucumber were placed on top of the *samer*. However, recently, Nasi Ambeng is served in a large round tray specifically designed for four people, along with drinks, *kuih*, and fruits.

Considering the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the execution of feasts has slightly changed due to concerns about virus transmission and government restrictions and guidelines. Based on observational activities in Kuala Selangor, the host who held the *tahlil* adhered to the feast tradition but with a limited number of *jemaah masjid* (mosque congregation) invited to the house, following the government's standard operating procedures (SOPs) during the pandemic. The rest of the *tahlil* execution, such as reciting *Surah al-Fatihah*, *Surah Yaasin*, supplications, and *du'a* for seeking forgiveness and blessings for the deceased, remained unchanged.

Nasi Ambeng is served after the *tahlil*. After the *imam* completes the prayer for eating, participants only consume *kuih*, fruits, and drinks. Next to each Nasi Ambeng tray, the hosts prepare scrolls of newspaper lined with banana leaves and tied with nylon strings. The *jemaah* (participants) divide Nasi Ambeng into four portions for four groups of *jemaah* using their hands and transfer their portion onto their individual wrapping. Each portion of Nasi Ambeng is wrapped, rolled, and secured with nylon strings. After some conversation among the *jemaah* while enjoying *kuih* and fruits, Nasi Ambeng is taken home as *Nasi Berkat* (blessed rice) to be shared and enjoyed by the *jemaah's* families at home.



Figure 1: From top, Nasi Ambeng was served in large round tray portioned for four persons, then divided by using hands into individual wrappings.

*Kenduri slametan* is executed differently, as hosts usually do not invite *jemaah masjid* to their house to recite *Surah Yaasin* and *doa selamat* for their sick mother, for instance, out of consideration for her health. The *kenduri* is held on Friday night among family members. Similar to *tahlil*, Javanese descendants typically serve Nasi Ambeng as the main dish. However, during the *kenduri* at night, Nasi Ambeng is not served or consumed. Instead, it is prepared and cooked as early as nine in the morning before the *kenduri* begins. As shown in the figure below, Nasi Ambeng is wrapped in waterproof paper lined with translucent plastic and a banana leaf. *Serondeng* is placed on top of the white rice, next to *mi goreng jawa*, *sambal goreng jawa*, fried chicken, fried tofu and tempeh, and fried salted fish. After the Nasi Ambeng is individually packed, it is distributed to the closest family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends. This practice has continued even during the pandemic.



Figure 2: The Nasi Ambeng was individually wrapped by using waterproof wrapper and secured with rubber band, then was given out to the neighbour, friends, and relatives.



## 4.2 Family Consumption



Figure 3: From top, the mother was preparing *sambal goreng jawa* for Nasi Ambeng by sauteing the ingredients, and from below shows that Nasi Ambeng was plated individually, served, and consumed together within the family.

Family consumption is a social ritual that symbolizes cohesion, closeness, and unity, and it plays a crucial role in strengthening family bonds (Chitakunye & Maclaran, 2008). When it comes to family consumption, Nasi Ambeng can be served and enjoyed on various occasions or even as a daily meal, as it has become a popular choice for any time of the day. However, having a special meal at home over the weekend can be a particularly enjoyable activity, as parents and children can spend time together, engaging in preparation activities and dining as a family. Therefore, in terms of family relationships, sharing meals and engaging in conversations can foster support and connection among family members.

Based on the participant observation conducted in their homes during the current study, Nasi Ambeng is regarded as a special dish. One participant, who had Javanese ancestry as her great ancestors originated from Java and immigrated to Malaysia a few decades ago, shared that Nasi Ambeng had become her children's favorite food since she introduced them to it during a *tahlil* event in her mother's hometown in Johor. In many Javanese households, Nasi Ambeng is typically served during lunch. However, instead of being served on a large round tray as in *kenduri*, it is served on individual plates. Each plate consists of a round-cut banana leaf, a portion of white rice, *sambal goreng jawa*, *mi goreng jawa*, black soy-sauced chicken, fried salted fish, *serondeng kelapa*, and an additional element known as *bergedil* (fried potato cake). Additionally, Nasi Ambeng is served in individual bowls placed in the middle of the table, allowing family members to refill their dishes during the meal. This practice of serving Nasi Ambeng individually is observed to be more hygienic and convenient, as the components of Nasi Ambeng are not mixed together on a single tray. The dishes can also be stored in the refrigerator and reheated for later consumption, providing flexibility and convenience.



Figure 4: From top left to right was the palm and rubber plantation that were located next to each other and the stainless-steel tiffin as well as mat and plastic plates. After they finished the work, they rest and ate Nasi Ambeng under the shady palm-oil tree.

In addition to being consumed as a special weekend meal, Nasi Ambeng is also served during lunchtime at orchards or rubber and palm plantations by Javanese families in Malaysia. Historically, the Javanese community worked in the plantation industry, particularly in the palm oil and rubber sectors. Over the course of several decades, they transitioned from being workers to owning and managing vast hectares of rubber and palm oil plantations, which they passed down through generations. As a result, the younger generations have expanded these plantations and reaped the benefits from them. During the observation activity, the researcher encountered a participant who worked full-time in the agricultural sector and dedicated time to managing his own orchards and plantations. He would bring food to the orchard and plantation in the morning, aiming to satisfy their hunger or "*alas perut*" before returning home for lunch. Since the participant sometimes spent extended periods working in the orchard and plantation, he preferred bringing a substantial meal for lunchtime. Nasi Ambeng was his top choice, as it had become an integral part of his life and his all-time favorite meal as a Javanese. As early as four in the morning, his wife would begin cooking Nasi Ambeng, consisting of white rice, *sambal goreng jawa*, *mi goreng jawa*, fried tofu and tempeh, and fried salted fish, often excluding *serondeng kelapa* due to its longer preparation time. The *serondeng kelapa* would be cooked a day prior. Subsequently, the Nasi Ambeng was packed in a stainless-steel tiffin carrier with five compartments, each filled with different components, ready to be taken to the orchard. Around one in the afternoon, the Nasi Ambeng would typically be enjoyed on a mat, situated beneath a shady palm oil tree.

### 4.3 Business Activity



Figure 5: The dishes of Nasi Ambeng at Warung Ibu Nasi Ambeng are put in the food pan inserts and the staff would take each of them for the customers.

Nasi Ambeng is widely served and available at numerous eateries and restaurants, as it has captured the hearts of Malaysians and is considered on par with other cuisines. In Malaysia, there are many well-established restaurants that offer Nasi Ambeng as an everyday meal, particularly during lunchtime. For the purpose of the current study, Warung Ibu Nasi Ambeng, a renowned Nasi Ambeng eatery in Tanjung Karang, Selangor, was chosen to observe the present practice of serving Nasi Ambeng in Malaysia. This restaurant is famous for its Nasi Ambeng as well as other delicacies such as *soto ayam*, *nasi campur*, *cucur udang*, *pecel*, and *udang celup tepung*. What sets Warung Ibu Nasi Ambeng apart is its location next to the owner's house, creating a homely atmosphere with a motherly touch. Operating as early as 10:30 in the morning, the restaurant quickly attracted a crowd of customers who eagerly lined up to savor the delectable Nasi Ambeng and other mouth-watering dishes. Some customers chose to dine in, while others opted to take the food home. As depicted in the figure below, the various components of Nasi Ambeng, such as *sambal goreng jawa*, *mi goreng jawa*, *serondeng kelapa*, and chicken dishes (fried spiced-chicken and ayam masak kicap), were carefully arranged in deep food inserts. Upon customer requests, the workers scooped out white rice along with the Nasi Ambeng elements onto a plate that had been lined with a banana leaf. At Warung Ibu Nasi Ambeng, two Nasi Ambeng packages were available: (1) a regular set for one person, and (2) Nasi Ambeng *kahwin* – a set for two people, accompanied by two glasses of refreshing lime and sour plum juice.



Figure 6: The scenario of the trader selling Nasi Ambeng at night market at Tanjong Karang.

Night markets in Malaysia have long been popular destinations for locals, primarily due to the wide variety of delicacies they offer. The selection of foods available at night markets is considered exceptional and unique, as these markets often reflect distinct characteristics of Malaysia's culture, including the eating habits, people, and demographic diversity. In Pasar Malam Tanjong Karang, Selangor, which operates on Sundays from three in the evening until eleven at night, Nasi Ambeng is sold under the 'Nasi Ambeng Tg. Karang Pasar Malam' tent. At this night market, Nasi Ambeng dishes such as *sambal goreng jawa*, *mi goreng jawa*, *serondeng kelapa*, and fried salted fish are displayed in separate containers, while the fried chickens are arranged on a tray. Nasi Ambeng is not pre-packed but is prepared upon customer's request (see Figure 6). The stall packs Nasi Ambeng in newspaper sheets and a banana leaf, following the traditional Nasi Ambeng wrapping style. However, the outer layers are alternated with commercial waterproof food wrapper sheets to prevent any leaks or spills. Nasi Ambeng is sold at a highly affordable and reasonable price considering the portion size. In summary, the serving of Nasi Ambeng at night markets is practiced as a commercial activity, as vendors sell Nasi Ambeng to generate income and revenue.



Figure 7: Nasi Ambeng is served in buffet style in the catering service.

Furthermore, the catering service sector is a vital part of the hospitality industry, offering a wide range of services. These services include restaurant services, catering services by reservation, mobile catering services, contract catering services, and transportation catering (Asri et al., 2015; Hamzah & Omar, 1992). Among these, food catering services are the most common and easily recognizable type of catering business. Food caterers often provide an extensive selection of meals and popular menu items that are frequently served at wedding ceremonies in Malaysia. In a traditional Malay matrimonial ceremony, *Nasi Biryani* or *Nasi Minyak* is typically served along with various side dishes such as *ayam kurma*, *ayam masak merah*, and *kurma daging*. However, the menu for other events may vary based on the host's culinary preferences and the available menu packages offered by caterers. For example, a catering service in Johor not only served traditional wedding delicacies but also offered a variety of other dishes upon customer request. These dishes included *Nasi Tomato*, *Nasi Ayam Madu*, *Nasi Lemak*, and *Nasi Ambeng*. *Nasi Ambeng* proved to be the most popular meal choice for numerous events and occasions, including birthday parties, *kenduri tahlil*, *kenduri slametan*, and religious celebrations like Hari Raya Aidilfitri. Typically, customers contact caterers to make reservations for food catering services and request specific dishes like *Nasi Ambeng* that suit their events or occasions. *Nasi Ambeng* is usually served in a buffet style, with chafing dishes or stainless-steel inserts used to keep the various *Nasi Ambeng* dishes separate. In addition to the *Nasi Ambeng* dishes, which include white rice, *sambal goreng jawa*, *mi goreng jawa*, *serondeng kelapa*, fried salted fish, and chicken dishes, the menu also includes beverages and fruits such as watermelon.



Figure 8: Nasi Ambeng sold in several packages that comprised of different portion and the picture of Nasi Ambeng is posted on Instagram.

There are also numerous home-based businesses that are promoted on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, which is now easily accessible to the public. According to Wally and Koshy (2014), Instagram is an effective and cost-friendly medium for entrepreneurs, especially those operating home-based businesses, as it offers great user-friendliness and significant visibility for their products. Given the popularity of Instagram as a photo-sharing platform, many home-based entrepreneurs market their products by sharing enticing photos on their social media feeds. These sellers often post multiple pictures of Nasi Ambeng on Instagram, each accompanied by a caption and description that provides details about the available packages, prices, and quantities. For example, *Nasi Ambeng Kayangan* offers a variety of packages, each with a different portion size and price. The *Jumblo* package is designed for one person, while the other packages cater to up to four people. It is noteworthy that home-based entrepreneurs, particularly those selling Nasi Ambeng, extensively promote their products on Instagram. The entire process of Nasi Ambeng preparation, cooking, and packaging takes place at home rather than in a physical stall or restaurant. To make Nasi Ambeng reservations, customers simply need to click the link provided in the Instagram bio of *Nasi Ambeng Kayangan*, which directs them to WhatsApp. The reserved Nasi Ambeng will then be delivered to customers at the agreed location and on the specified date using delivery services.

## 5 Discussion

The Javanese community migrated into Malaysia within the last 100 years and assimilated with the Malay through cross-cultural marriage, resulting in the emergence

of a Javanese-Malay community. Since then, several adaptations and adoptions have occurred, including the diffusion of Javanese traditions into daily life events such as weddings, feasts, and occasions, as well as traditional foods. Nasi Ambeng, one of the prominent dishes in Malaysia, is an excellent example of this cultural diffusion. This paper examines the current practices of Nasi Ambeng among the modern Javanese community in Malaysia.

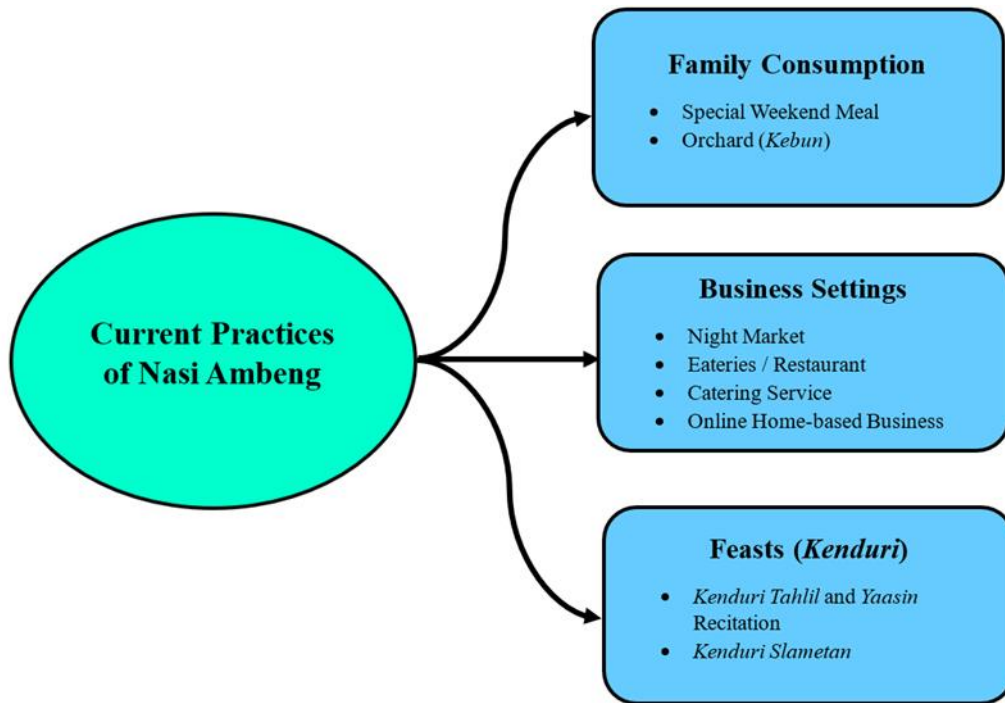


Figure 9: A visual illustration of Current Practices of Nasi Ambeng among modern Javanese community in Malaysia

A narrative analysis based on observation activities reveals a significant change in Nasi Ambeng serving practices. In the past, Nasi Ambeng was typically served only during special feasts or occasions. While the modern Javanese community has developed some new aspects of serving Nasi Ambeng, it is still commonly served at feasts such as *kenduri tahlil* and *kenduri kesyukuran*. However, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the execution of these feasts has been slightly altered, limiting the number of people allowed to attend. Nonetheless, the pandemic has not hindered the practice of serving Nasi Ambeng, which remains a vital aspect of these feasts.

Moreover, Nasi Ambeng is not limited to feasts or kenduri and is now consumed by families as a special weekend or lunch meal at an orchard or plantation. Nasi Ambeng is also eaten during normal family meals, consolidating and strengthening the bond between family members, as proven in a study by Neely et al. (2014). Nasi Ambeng is passed down from generation to generation, and its continued practice is a testament

to the strong consciousness and Javanese blood that runs through the veins of Javanese descendants in Malaysia. In addition, Nasi Ambeng has become a famous dish sold in various business settings due to modern equipment and business opportunities. With several adaptations and the use of modern technology, the practice of serving Nasi Ambeng has advanced to a new level, with night markets, eateries, restaurants, catering businesses, home-based businesses, and online businesses selling and providing Nasi Ambeng. The use of modern equipment, such as cooking stoves powered by liquid petroleum gas (LPG), has simplified the cooking process, resulting in high cooking efficiency and time savings.

The commercialization of Nasi Ambeng has resulted in its continuity as people consume it as their daily meal. Moreover, the power of online marketing on social media has enabled people to experience the taste of Nasi Ambeng, resulting in the emergence of night markets, eateries, catering businesses, and online businesses, which have helped preserve traditional food for future generations.

Finally, the latest practices of Nasi Ambeng could be used as a pull factor to introduce it widely, especially to outsiders such as foreign or domestic tourists, attracting them to visit Malaysia for culinary tourism and boosting the country's economy. Additionally, this study could provide insights for state tourism authorities, organizations that elevate traditional foods as national treasures, and representatives of ethnic groups in Malaysia, particularly the Javanese. Due to the original values found in Nasi Ambeng, it has the potential to be commercialized and preserved for future generations, helping them understand the importance of preserving traditional food heritage.

## **6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the current practices of Nasi Ambeng among the modern Javanese in Malaysia can be categorized into feasts (*kenduri*), family consumption, and business settings. It is important to note that the practice of serving Nasi Ambeng is not limited to special occasions or feasts but is widely consumed, especially at home and can be purchased anywhere. Despite the adaptations in Nasi Ambeng service practices among modern Javanese communities, the essence of Nasi Ambeng is still preserved and sustained for the present and future generations. However, it is crucial to preserve the authenticity of Nasi Ambeng to prevent it from losing its identity due to excessive modifications and additional elements that could potentially compromise its originality.

This paper demonstrates how the practice of serving Nasi Ambeng has evolved among the modern Javanese community in Malaysia. The findings of this study can contribute to the gastronomic literature, both from academic and practical perspectives. However, it is important to acknowledge that this paper does not address how Nasi Ambeng is currently maintained and practiced. Therefore, further research should shed



light on the sustainability of traditional food, particularly Nasi Ambeng, and examine the potential factors involved in future studies.

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