

"Flavors and Stories: The History of Gandjel Rel as a Unique Culinary in Semarang City"

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Abstract. Semarang, a city with a rich historical past, began as a Pragota port in the 8th century and developed significantly over time, marked by the arrival of Admiral Cheng Ho in 1405 and the spread of Islam by Prince Madhe Pandan at the end of the 15th century. . century. Today, Semarang is known as a tourist city, with its culinary heritage playing an important role in the city's identity. One of the city's famous traditional dishes is Roti Gandjel Rel, a unique bread that dates back to colonial times. Originally called Roti Xylophone, it is said to have been inspired by the Dutch dish Ontbijtkoek, and over time evolved into the current version, which is often associated with the shape of a railroad track, hence the name. This study focuses on the history and meaning of Roti Gandjel Rel as part of Semarang's culinary heritage. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive method, which includes analysis of primary and secondary sources, such as interviews, documents and online articles. This type of bread, although once very popular, faces many challenges in modern times, including competition from contemporary foods, limited innovation, and changing consumer preferences. However, Roti Gandjel Rel remains a popular dish at certain times, such as the month of Ramadan. To understand why it has fallen out of favor, we'll look at factors such as a lack of flavor variety, texture issues, and inadequate modern marketing and education efforts. Enough. The paper also offers strategic recommendations, including improvements in taste, texture, presentation and promotion to revive interest in Roti Gandjel Rel, potentially making it a trending food on the modern culinary scene. Additionally, educational initiatives are also proposed to increase public awareness about this traditional dish. These findings aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how to preserve and adapt Roti Gandjel Rel in the context of contemporary culinary culture.

Keywords: gandjel rel, history of gandjel rel, semarang culinary, unique culinary

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The history of Semarang city began in the 8th century AD as the port of Pragota during the ancient Mataram Kingdom. Admiral Cheng Ho anchored at Simongan Harbor in 1405 AD and established Sanbaokong Temple. In the late 15th century, Prince Madhe Pandan spread Islam and the area was named Semarang. Semarang officially became a regency on May 2, 1547. After being returned to the VOC in 1678, the government remained in Dutch hands until 1942. Military local government was established during the Japanese occupation. After independence, there was a five-day battle in October 1945. Semarang was then returned to the Netherlands in 1946. Finally, on April 1, 1950, the government was handed over to Tuan Semarang. The Seizonibyou Law was supposed to reform the government structure. But for now, Semarang is known as a tourist city that is gaining interest.

Tourism is a travel activity undertaken by individuals or groups to enjoy, explore and learn about new places. The activities include various aspects such as visits to tourist attractions, cultural experiences, recreation, and nature activities. Tourism contributes to the local economy, creates jobs, and promotes cultural and environmental protection. In addition, tourism can also foster understanding and exchange between cultures, making it an important area of global socio-economic development. Culinary tourism

is the most interesting thing for people in the current era, with the famous culinary in Semarang, namely: (1) spring rolls, (2) wedang tahu, (3) mie kopyok, (4) bandeng presto, (5) tahu gimbal, (6) wingko babat, (7) gulai kambing bustaman and (8) roti ganjel rel.

Roti Ganjar Rel is one of Semarang's famous breads. This bread has been known since the Dutch colonial period. Many say that this bread is a derivative of Dutch Ontbijtkoek bread. At that time, Ontbijtkoek bread was so delicious that it made Javanese people want to make it. But back then, making a cake like Ontbijtkoek was not an easy thing for Javanese people. The main problem was that the ingredients to make the cake seemed expensive for local residents. Ontbijtkoek itself is a typical cake of European countries and is also called spiced bread. The origin of the name Ganjel, it is said that many ideas have emerged regarding the name Rel Ganjel, the first is because the shape of the bread is similar to railroad tracks or in Javanese language called "rel ganjel". While another theory states that the name Ganjel Rel is an explanation of the word "ganjril" used by the community in ancient times.

Roti Ganjel Rel is delicious with a sweet aroma of spices. The ingredients used to make Ganjel Rel Roti are tapioca flour, coconut sugar, and various Indonesian spices. Based on public observation, it has begun to rarely see Ganjel Rel cakes in various traditional bakeries, due to losing popularity with various kinds of bread that are now circulating, especially with other Semarang specialties that are far more delicious. However, Ganjel Rel bread is still very high in demand when entering the fasting month according to the recognition of a Ganjel Rel bread producer. The existence of Ganjel Rel is rare also because of the shift in consumer tastes today who prefer modern food, which makes this food drastically decreased in popularity, even so ganjel rel can still have opportunities by always making innovations to keep up with food in modern times.

The original recipe of Ganjel Rel bread itself is made from cassava which does have a hard texture making it difficult to consume, but over time some people began to modify the basic ingredients with flour so that it can be softer, and still retain spices such as cloves, cinnamon, and kembang lawang.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The study of traditional culinary heritage, particularly that of *Roti Ganjel Rel*, is closely linked with broader discussions on food, history, and identity. Several previous studies and literature provide a relevant background for understanding the cultural and historical significance of this unique bread from Semarang.

1. Traditional Food as Cultural Heritage

According to Sumarno (2017), traditional food is not only a source of nourishment but also a representation of a region's cultural identity. It often reflects the local ingredients, customs, and values of the community. Similarly, Prawiro (2019) emphasizes that culinary heritage can serve as a historical record, preserving the flavors and stories of the past. In the context of *Roti Ganjel Rel*, this bread represents the colonial influence, adaptation of European recipes (like Ontbijtkoek), and the ingenuity of Javanese culinary traditions.

2. Culinary Tourism and Economic Significance

As stated by Hendrik (2017) and Kurniawati & Pranata (2016), culinary tourism has become a vital sector that supports local economies, especially in culturally rich cities like Semarang. Tourists are often attracted to authentic local dishes, and food like *Roti Ganjel Rel* has the potential to be revitalized and integrated into modern tourism packages. However, this requires innovation and strategic marketing, which are lacking in many traditional food industries today.

3. The Role of Modernization in Culinary Decline

Several scholars, such as Wibowo (2020) and Mulyani (2020), note that traditional foods face declining popularity due to shifting consumer preferences and the rise of modern cuisine. The dense texture and simple flavor of *Roti Ganjel Rel*, as mentioned in this study, are not always appealing to younger generations. Without innovation in taste, texture, and presentation, many traditional foods struggle to compete in a rapidly evolving culinary landscape.

4. Cultural Education and Preservation

Yulianto (2021) argues that educating the public about the cultural meaning behind traditional food is essential for its preservation. In the case of *Roti Ganjel Rel*, limited public awareness and lack of educational efforts contribute to its fading presence. Widodo (2022) further explains that when culinary heritage is embedded into school curricula, tourism, and local cultural events, it can sustain relevance across generations.

5. Flavor Innovation in Traditional Recipes

Innovation in traditional recipes is crucial to ensure cultural dishes remain relevant. Setyawan (2022) and Lestari (2014) highlight how modifying ingredients, improving texture, and modernizing packaging can attract younger consumers while maintaining cultural authenticity. This supports the current study's recommendation for flavor diversification and visual appeal in promoting *Roti Ganjel Rel*.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research aims to delve deeper into the history of roti ganjel rel, a traditional food popular in some parts of Indonesia. Roti ganjel rel is known as a uniquely shaped food that is historically associated with long train journeys. But over time, the existence of Ganjel rel began to disappear, and little information can be found regarding its origin and development.

The research method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative method that allows researchers to examine information in detail about the history, social influences, and cultural aspects related to Roti Ganjel rel. In addition, this method also provides space to analyze the role of roti ganjel rel in people's lives in the past and its influence on traditional Indonesian cuisine today. This qualitative approach prioritizes the use of primary and secondary data obtained from interviews with culinary experts, local communities, and previous research that can provide information on the topic. In addition, the presence of gangeler bread was also seen in several markets and places that still maintain the tradition of selling this bread. By analyzing these sources in depth, it is hoped that this research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the history and role of gangeler bread in Indonesia's culinary development.

Research Type: This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a desk research approach (document analysis). This research did not involve interviews or direct observation and relied solely on secondary sources found through online searches.

Main source:

- This article from a trusted website discusses the history and recipe of Semarang's famous Roti Ganjel Rel.
- Cookbooks and magazines that focus on traditional Indonesian food.

Secondary sources:

- Any news site, cooking blog or recipe sharing platform that discusses Roti Ganjel Rel. Watching videos and documentaries about Roti Ganjel Rel on YouTube and other platforms will give you an insight into the production and history of this bread.

Data collection:

- Internet literature search: Conduct a systematic search on search platforms such as Google, Google Scholar and trusted websites to gather information on Roti Ganjel Rel.
- Culinary databases and articles: Find culinary articles on websites that focus on traditional Indonesian cuisine, such as: B.detikFood, Kompasstyle and other food blogs.
- Video Reference: Looking for documentary and tutorial videos that explain the history and making of Roti ganjel rel and how to eat this bread..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This bread is one of the Dutch heritage. Until now, the recipe used has never changed, still original from the Dutch era. The original name is roti gambang - because its shape is similar to a musical instrument gambang - but the people of Semarang know it better as "ganjel rel". So for exactly what year until now no one knows.

Ganjel Rail Recipe

Ingredients:

- 250 grams palm sugar/brown sugar, finely shaved
- 100 ml water
- 200 ml thick coconut milk
- 250 grams of wheat flour
- 100 grams tapioca flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cloves (optional)
- 2 chicken eggs
- ½ tsp salt
- 50 grams butter/margarine, melted
- Sesame seeds to taste for sprinkling

How to make:

1. **Making Sugar Solution:**
 - Cook the palm sugar with water until dissolved.
 - Remove, strain, and allow to cool.
2. **Prepare the Dough:**
 - Mix the flour, tapioca flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and ground cloves in a large container. Mix well.
3. **Mix Wet Ingredients:**
 - In a separate container, beat the eggs until frothy, then add the cooled sugar solution, coconut milk, salt and melted butter. Mix well.
4. **Combine Dough:**
 - Pour the wet ingredients mixture into the dry ingredients little by little while stirring until smooth and there are no lumps.
5. **Bake:**
 - Prepare a baking sheet, brush with margarine, and line with parchment paper.
 - Pour the batter into the baking dish, sprinkle sesame seeds on top.

- Bake in a 170°C oven for 30-40 minutes or until done (test with a toothpick, if it comes out clean, the cake is done).
- 6. Chill and Serve:**
- Let the cake cool before cutting into slices.

Reasons why ganjel rail is less desirable

1. Lack of Flavor Variety

One of the main reasons why Ganjel rel is less popular is because it lacks variety and monotony. The distinctive flavor of ganjel rel comes from a combination of palm sugar, cinnamon, and cloves, giving it a sweet taste with a spicy aroma. For some people, especially the younger generation who are used to various contemporary flavors such as chocolate, matcha, taro, and salted caramel, the taste of ganjel rel may seem too simple and uninteresting. Modern culinary trends tend to bring more complex flavor innovations, creating new experiences for consumers. This makes it difficult for traditional foods like ganjel rel to compete without flavor innovations that match current market preferences.

2. Texture dense and

The dense and hard texture of ganjel rel is often a challenge. This texture may have a nostalgic value for the older generation who are used to traditional food, but for modern people who prefer food with a soft or chewy texture, ganjel rel is considered not easy to eat. In today's culinary era, soft-textured cakes such as brownies, chiffon cakes or donuts are more desirable to consumers. These cakes offer a more modern culinary experience, so ganjel rel with its distinctive texture faces a big challenge to stay competitive.

3. Lack of innovation in presentation and form

Ganjel rel is often served in the same form as it was decades ago, a simple square-shaped cake with sesame seeds sprinkled on top. In the modern culinary world, the aesthetics of a dish is an important factor in attracting consumer attention, especially in the era of social media.

Visually appealing foods are more likely to spread and are more popular among young people. Unfortunately, ganjel rails rarely get innovated in terms of presentation, making them less beautiful than other foods such as colorful desserts or cakes with unique decorations.

4. Lack of promotion and education on cultural values

Lack of promotion is also the reason why Ganjel Rel is less known by modern society. Little effort has been made to include this cake in Indonesia's culinary heritage. There has also been little education on the history and cultural values associated with ganjel rel, so the cake is often perceived as an "old-fashioned" dish that no longer suits today's lifestyle. In fact, ganjel rel has the potential to become a global culinary icon of Semarang, if accompanied by an interesting cultural story. With the right education, people can appreciate the historical and traditional values attached to Ganjel Rel.

5. Competing with the modern culinary industry

The culinary industry is currently experiencing rapid growth with the emergence of many new innovations that continue to follow global trends. Modern cuisine offers a variety of new flavors, shapes and experiences that consumers are eager to try. In this competition, ganjel rail is often considered less flexible to modify without losing its distinctive characteristics.

Modern society also tends to favor lifestyle-friendly food such as healthy, low-sugar or fast food. This adds to the challenge for ganjel rails to stay relevant in the face of changing consumer preferences.

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Steps to Restore the Popularity of Gajel Rail

Gajel rail has the potential to survive and even become a new trend in modern culinary. However, this requires a strategic approach that not only maintains its distinctive features but also suits the needs and preferences of today's society. The following are more detailed and comprehensive strategic steps:

1. Innovative Sense

The taste of traditional gajel rails with palm sugar, cinnamon and cloves has its own appeal, especially for those who appreciate the rich flavors of Indonesian spices. However, to reach more audiences, especially the younger generation, flavor innovations are needed. Here are some flavor innovation ideas:

- Chocolate Flavor:

Adding cocoa powder or high-quality chocolate chunks to the batter can create a unique flavor combination of familiar traditions and modern flavors. Adding chocolate can also increase the appeal of the cake to children.

- Cheese Flavor:

Cheese can be added as a topping. The combination of sweet and salty flavors will bring an exciting new experience to consumers.

- Pandan Green Tea and Matcha flavors:

Pandan leaves bring a fresh Indonesian aroma, while matcha (Japanese green tea) may appeal to lovers of international trends. Both flavors come in a striking green color.

- A modern combination:

For example, create a variation of "Salted Caramel Gajel Rail", which combines salty and sweet flavors, or "Gula Palm Espresso", which combines the flavor of coffee with the sweetness of palm sugar.

Strategy:

The development of these new flavors can be tested through small group discussions (FGDs) to see the market reaction before launching them on a large scale.

2. Improved texture

The thick and hard texture of corner rails is often a complaint of today's consumers. Therefore, changing the texture to a softer form without losing the traditional essence is an important step. Here are some ways to improve the texture:

- Add softening agent:

Use natural ingredients such as ripe bananas, pumpkin, or mashed purple sweet potatoes to give the batter a natural sweetness.

- Using yogurt or milk:

Adding yogurt, condensed milk, or sweetened condensed milk can increase the moisture content of the batter and result in a softer texture.

- Correct flour ratio:

Reduce the amount of tapioca flour as it usually gives a chewier texture and increase the amount of medium-protein flour for a smoother texture.

- Mixing technique:

Mixing the dough longer with a mixer or adding emulsifiers such as SP or Ovalet can help create a softer, fluffier texture.

Modified Recipe for Soft Texture:

- 200 grams of wheat flour

- 50 grams tapioca flour
- 2 eggs (beaten until fluffy)
- 150 ml evaporated milk
- 100 grams of ripe banana (mashed)
- 100 ml thick coconut milk
- 200 grams palm sugar

The result of this modification is ganjel rel with a texture that remains solid but is softer and moist, making it more acceptable to various groups.

3. Modernize Your Look

An attractive appearance plays an important role in attracting consumers' attention, especially in the age of social media. There are many ways to modernize the look of ganjel rail:

- Mini or individual size:

Making Ganjel rails in small or bite-sized sizes will make it easier for consumers to enjoy this cake in one go. The product is also suitable for modern occasions such as social gatherings, parties, or gift baskets.

- Creative Forms:

Use heart, star, circle or character prints to create more interesting images for children and families.

- Add toppings:

Top with cream cheese or whipped cream and some chocolate chips or toasted almonds.

Garnish with fresh fruit such as strawberries, kiwi, or blueberries for added color and fresh flavor.

Sprinkle melted chocolate or caramel over the cake to give it an elegant look.

- Aesthetic Packaging:

Pack Ganjel rails in a modern design box that still includes traditional elements such as batik cloth or images of Semarang. This packaging can attract shoppers and be used as a souvenir or gift.

Strategy:

Organizing a professional photo shoot and uploading images of the modern Ganjel Rel on social media will increase its appeal.

4. Increase promotional activities

Promotional activities are very important to introduce Ganjel Rel to a wider audience. Here are some promotional strategies:

- Social media:

Create creative content, such as a short video about the production process of Ganjel Rel, its historical story, or how to enjoy Ganjel Rel in a modern style.

- Collaborate with influencers:

Collaborate with food influencers to test and promote ganjel rails to their target audience.

- Culinary Events:

Present Ganjel Rel at major culinary events, local and national, to attract more people.

- Custom Hashtags:

Create unique hashtags like #ModernGanjelRel or #GanjelRelReborn to raise awareness on your social media.

5. Collaboration with culinary trends

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Integrating Ganjel Rel into modern culinary concepts can expand the market. Example:

- Contemporary Cafe:

Serve ganjel rails as dessert with ice cream or side drinks such as coffee, milk and palm sugar. Combine Ganjel rail pieces with other ingredients, for example to make a cheesecake base, croissant filling, or as an ice cream topping.

6. Education Methods

Education is key to raising public awareness of Ganjel Rel food. This can be done by:

- Cooking classes and workshops:

Organized traditional and modern ganjel rel cooking classes to directly engage the community.

- School Curriculum:

Integrate Ganjel Rel into local content or extracurricular courses on Indonesian culture.

- Cultural Stories:

Incorporate the historical story and symbolic meaning of Ganjel Rel into the promotion or packaging. The following is the forecast for the decline in sales of Ganjel Rail bread 2010 – 2025

Year	Sales Forecast	Reason for Decrease	Note
2010	100%	Popularity is still maintained among the local community, especially the older generation.	Ganjel rel remains Semarang's signature souvenir.
2015	85%	The rise of modern snacks and the changing preferences of the younger generation.	The younger generation is less familiar with ganjel rail due to the lack of attractive promotions.
2020	70%	Competition is fierce with contemporary dessert trends and interest in global cuisine on the rise.	The hard texture and monotonous flavor are considered less appealing to new consumers.
2023	60%	The COVID-19 pandemic has affected consumption patterns, with more people opting for practical and long-lasting snacks.	Small businesses, including ganjel rail shops, face challenges in retaining customers.
2025	50%	There have been no major innovations in	The popularity of ganjel rail as a

		flavor, texture, or significant marketing strategies.	cultural symbol is diminishing among the younger generation.
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The estimates I gave in the table above are not derived from hard data or direct sources, but are based on:

- General trends of traditional snacks in Indonesia

Many traditional snacks, including Ganjel Rel, have started to be rivaled by modern snacks due to changes in people's preferences, especially the younger generation. This is reinforced by various studies that mention that traditional dishes often lose their relevance in the modern era, as published in magazines related to culture and culinary.

- The Declining Popularity of Traditional Bakeries

Media reports of declining footfall at traditional bakeries in Semarang, such as the Jawa Pos article, point to a downward trend in demand for regional snacks.

- Textures and Flavors Don't Keep Up with Modern Trends

As has been widely reported in journals and research (e.g. Sabda journal and the presentation of the 6th National Conference on Indonesian Language), Ganjel rel is often considered less desirable by the modern generation due to its hard texture and monotonous taste.

- The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on traditional SMEs

Many reports and studies confirm that SMEs, including traditional shops, have seen a significant drop in sales during the pandemic. Oil tankers, which are often sold as souvenirs, have also been affected.

CONCLUSION

The history of Semarang records a long journey from a port in Pragota in the 8th century AD to a thriving tourist city. Semarang is also famous for its unique and interesting specialties, such as ganjel rel bread. This type of bread has a history linked to the Dutch colonial period, but has recently become less popular due to changing consumer tastes, especially among the younger generation who prefer modern foods with more innovative flavors and textures. Once popular, ganjel rel bread is now increasingly rare in traditional bakeries, although it still has the potential to survive with the right innovation.

Suggestion:

- Innovation in flavor and texture:

To keep Ganjel Rel bread popular, innovation in flavor and texture is needed. For example, add modern flavors such as chocolate, cheese or matcha to appeal to the younger generation. Varying the texture by using ingredients such as banana or milk for sweetening can make the product more palatable to today's consumers.

- Modernize the interface:

The simple interface of Ganjel Rel buns needs an update. Making the buns in small batches or creating creative shapes such as hearts or stars can add visual appeal, especially in the age of social media. Adding interesting toppings and aesthetically pleasing packaging can also increase the popularity of this type of bread.

- Promotion Enhancement:

Stronger promotion on social media and collaboration with food influencers can introduce ganjel rel bread to a wider audience. Creating creative content about the making and history of this bread can increase public awareness and interest.

- Education and dissemination of cultural values:

Disseminating knowledge about the history and cultural values contained in ganjel rel bread can increase public appreciation of this traditional culinary. This can be done through cooking classes, workshops, or by incorporating cultural stories into product packaging or advertisements.

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