



# Ubo Rampe of Covid-19 *Tolak Balak*

## A Meaning Study on Symbolic Forms of Covid-19 Traditional Ritual Prevention in Kampung Buddha Sodong Ponorogo

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**Abstract.** This research is aimed to describe and explain the symbolic form meaning of ritual materials or Ubo Rampe in Covid-19 *Tolak Balak* held in Kampung Buddha Sodong, Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. This research was conducted for 17 months using an ethnographic approach. The research data was taken by interview and observation. To get valid data validated by source triangulation. The valid data were then analyzed using an interactive model of qualitative analysis. From the research carried out, it can be explained that the ubo rampe used in the Covid-19 *Tolak Balak* ritual contains the meaning of vertical and horizontal human relationships. The seven kinds of boreh flowers, frankincense/ kemenyan, red incense/Dupa, rice ambeng, rice golong and chicken ikung show the relationship between humans and God. Meanwhile, boiled eggs, urab vegetables and plantains contain the meaning of human relations with themselves and with each other. This symbol implies that humans in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic must be prepared carefully, must be able to adapt and share benefit to the environment, must be fair and wise.

**Keywords:** Symbolic Forms · Traditional Ritual · Covid-19

## 1 Introduction

Culture is a way of feeling and thinking that expresses itself in all aspects of human life community that form social unity in space and time. One of the most prominent elements of Javanese culture is Kejawen customs or traditions. The basic thought and cultural history that is typical of Javanese culture is the use of symbols or symbols as a means and media to leave messages or advice for the nation. The history of Java shows the use of these symbols in the actions, language, and religion of the Javanese that have been used since prehistoric times. The uniqueness of a Javanese tradition is that it is a religious tradition that is passed down as a religious tradition that is passed down from generation to generation. The tradition is the embodiment of a strong belief in customs and the community's response to the forces of nature and supernatural powers to find out the meaning contained in the ceremony. Every traditional ceremony has a religious meaning for its supporters, where the community will get a sense of security and inner peace if they have carried it out. All customs that have developed in people's

lives until now are still preserved, because they contain teachings or knowledge that contain norms, values and regulations in regulating people's behavior while still having faith in supernatural powers.

One of the elements of culture that has attracted the public attention during the Covid-19 pandemic is religion in all its manifestations. Religious traditions by most people are considered to hold an important key in relation to people's lives. The community seems to continue to increase the splendor and solemnity, both in the form of traditional rituals and socio-religious. The spirit of carrying out religious traditions also occurred in the Buddhist Village of Sodong Hamlet, Bracelet Kulon Village, Sampung District, Ponorogo Regency, East Java Province. The residents of this village held a Covid-19 *Tolak Balak* ritual at the village maid named Sela Bale.

Community members in carrying out the *Tolak Balak* ritual are those who carry out independently and some are carried out together with other community members. Residents of the Sodong Buddha Village community held a mass COVID-19 pandemic *Tolak Balak* ritual in the months of *Shawwal* 2020 and 2021. The residents together with religious leaders, hamlet leaders, and hamlet officials held various ubo rampes, and held reog at the Sela Bale punden. Ubo rampe is a set of tools or others used for rituals. Many community members take part in the ritual of *Tolak Balak* the balance but not a few people who do not understand and understand the meaning contained in the ubo rampe. This will result in a loss of meaning and ultimately become unsustainable and the emergence of social problems that are motivated by the degradation of values and morals. In fact, the ritual of *Tolak Balak* balance in Indonesia generally contains noble symbolic values and has the potential to be a source of community survival. Therefore, this research is interesting and needs to be carried out with the aim of describing and explaining the symbolic meaning of ubo rampe in the ritual of *Tolak Balak* the balance of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kampung Buddha Sodong. The results of this study are expected to be used as a source of education and inspiration for the community.

## 2 Theoretical Frameworks

The *Tolak Balak* ceremony is one of the components in religious rituals. This ritual is in the form of various human activities to communicate and carry out worship to God, ancestral spirits, and other supernatural beings [1]. The goal is to be safe and avoid danger and interference from evil spirits. This is what the Acehnese people have done in the face of the Covid-19 outbreak [2]. This ritual of *Tolak Balak* of balance in the lives of people in various parts of Indonesia has become a traditional ceremony and is carried out regularly and in an orderly manner according to custom. The usual reject-balak ritual consists of a combination of one or more activities, such as prostrating, praying, offering sacrifices, eating together (Kenduri), fasting, and meditating [3].

In the implementation of traditional ceremonies such as the ritual of *Tolak Balak* reinforcements, offerings are needed. The offerings and ubo rampe are the actualization of the thoughts, desires, and feelings of the perpetrators to get closer to God [4]. Ubo rampe is also a symbolic discourse that is used as a means of spiritual negotiation for the unseen. This is done so that spirits above human strength do not interfere. By symbolically feeding the spirit, it is hoped that the spirit will be tame, and willing to help human life.

In ubo rampe implied messages from the community in the form of knowledge, ideas, beliefs, and values. The values of these symbols aim to be conveyed to the community to be understood and understood by the community itself [5]. The meaning of symbols as the meaning of messages is a must for a group of people towards religious activities and the belief system they adhere to. In the procession of each tradition there is always the meaning of certain symbols on the stages and processions of carrying out the ritual of the tradition [6].

Symbolic meaning in cultural studies is associated with “signs” with various perspectives and with different theories. Morris (in Masinambow and Hidayat [7]) explains that a symbol is a picture of a real or imaginary object that evokes feelings or is aroused by feelings. The symbols in ubo rampe are connotative in that they contain various potential meanings that appear associatively in their use and interpretation. In this context the “sign” in question is a sign on the environment that is given a certain meaning by the community so that it affects human behavior or the meaning given.

The relationship between human actions and symbols according to Blumer’s theory of symbolic interaction rests on three premises, namely (1) humans act on things based on the meanings that exist for them, (2) these meanings come from one’s social interactions with other people, and (3) these meanings are perfected during social interactions [8]. Ritzer also said that; (1) humans live in an environment of symbols and respond to these symbols, (2) through symbols humans are able to stimulate others, (3) through communication symbols can be learned a large number of meanings and values so that they can be learned the ways in which other people act [9]. Thus, ubo rampe as a symbol system functions as a means of structuring ritual activities. For citizens of a society, understanding the symbol system allows them to behave in accordance with what is expected of them by their fellow citizens.

### 3 Research Method

This research was conducted in Sodong Hamlet, Bracelet Kulon Village, Sampung District, Ponorogo Regency, East Java Province from April 2021 to August 2021. The research approach used was ethnographic qualitative [10], namely an attempt to examine a particular cultural group in data processing, since reduce, present and verify and conclude the data but emphasize more on interpretive studies. The informants of this research are Ledug art artists, community leaders, youth leaders, government officials. While the determination of the informants by purposive sampling technique. The data sources used are; (1) Primary sources in the form of information or facts obtained from informants and events or activities related to the Covid-19 outbreak and their meaning, (2) Secondary sources in the form of documents and object profiles, news in the mass media, and other relevant data.

Data collection techniques used are interviews, observation, and document recording [11]. The main instrument of this research is the researcher himself using logic and analytical thinking so that he is able to verify or conclude. While the auxiliary instruments are writing instruments and audio-visual recordings. The data obtained were validated by source triangulation technique. While the data analysis using interactive model qualitative analysis techniques.

This study is an ethnographic qualitative research. It is a way to explore behaviors that occur naturally in a particular culture or social group [12]. This research was conducted in Sodong village in Sampung District, Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. As the naturalistic reasons of this research type in which the researcher has to stay in the participant location in a period of time [13], the staying has held for one year (June 2020-May 2021). Data sources use primary information directly from the villagers and direct observations, as well as secondary sources; the related documentation, activity reports, and others in terms of an electric approach [10]. The informants in this study are chosen by purposive sampling technique. In checking the data validity, the triangulation technique is applied. While the data analysis is using the interactive model qualitative analysis technique.

## 4 Research Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Research Result

**Sight View of Kampung Buddha** Sodong Buddhist Village is one of the hamlets in the Braceletkulon Village, Sampung District, Ponorogo Regency, East Java Province. This village is located at coordinates  $111^{\circ} 17' - 111^{\circ} 52'$  East Longitude and  $7^{\circ} 49' - 8^{\circ} 20'$  South Latitude with an altitude of 1,153 to 1,263 m above sea level and has an area of 3,780 km<sup>2</sup>. The residences (houses) of the villagers are located on the slopes of Mount Deng and Bukit Sangha 1.1 km<sup>2</sup> while 2,680 km<sup>2</sup> are fields and forests (Fig. 1).

The area of Kampung Buddha Sodong is separated from the central government of Gelang Kulon Village and the surrounding villages. There are only two access roads to get to this village, namely the road north of the hamlet and the south of the hamlet. The population mobilization in and out of the Sodong Hamlet area is generally through the northern route to Pagerukir Village, Sampung District because the road is more gentle and some of it has been cemented. This is different from the southern route, which is steep and damaged, so that people rarely pass it, even though it is closer to the center of the Gelangkulon Village government.

The population of Sodong is 482 people and the majority of the education level is junior high school. Sodong hamlet is known as the "Buddhist Village" because in the 1950s 95% of the population was Buddhist. This is different from current conditions, where 122 people (22%) embrace Buddhism while 426 people (78%) embrace Islam [14]. Even though they have different religions or beliefs, the people of Kampung Buddha Sodong still interact socially in a harmonious and tolerant manner. This harmonious life is reflected in various aspects of life, including carrying out the Covid-19 start-up ritual.

**Tolak Balak Rituals** The leaders together with the community members carried out community service to clean the Dayang Sela Bale environment before the time for the ritual. In the implementation of this community service, funding and consumption are shared and voluntary. Residents are aware of bringing food and drinks to Dayang Sela Bale.

At the appointed time, the month of Shawwal (Javanese calendar) around 7.30, leaders and community members began to arrive at Dayang Sela Bale carrying ubo rampe in the form of seven kinds of boreh flowers, red incense, incense, rice ambeng, rice golong, inkung chicken, with various side dishes. Arriving at Sela Bale, residents







**Fig. 1.** Dusun Sodong Map, Gelangkulon Village, Sampung, Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia.

put ambeng rice, golong rice, and other food in the lady's yard. Residents then one by one to the altar while carrying red incense, frankincense and flowers of seven kinds. Seven kinds of flowers are sprinkled on the Sela Bale stone, incense is sprinkled on the stove, incense is burned and stuck around the stone, then sit cross-legged and say a mantra (prayer). After that, the residents went to the Sela Bale yard to carry out a feast in a position around the food (rice ambeng, rice golong and others) which were arranged in a central way.





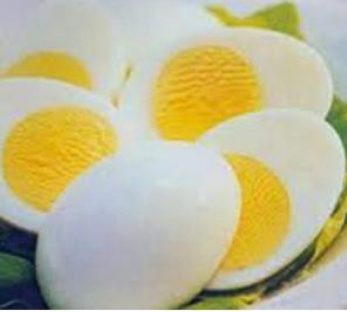
**Fig. 2.** Sodong Community was holding Covid-19 Tolak Balak ritual in danyang dusun Sela Bale.

**Table 1.** Symbolic form meaning of *Sesajen* and *Ubo Rampe* in Covid-19 Tolak Balak.

No	Name of Materials	Symbolic Form Meaning
1	 <p data-bbox="195 539 498 560">Seven kinds of Kembang boreh</p>	<p data-bbox="565 248 1012 354">This material symbolized the hope that what is being the goal in life is to get Pitulungan or help from the almighty, so it will be always staying safe and protected from Covid-19.</p>
2	 <p data-bbox="195 866 286 887">Kemeyan</p>	<p data-bbox="565 566 1012 725">The events held should always increase human faith in God Almighty. The embers of frankincense mean the spirit and hope in the human heart to realize hope. While the puff of incense smoke means that the prayer that is said is heard by God</p>
3	 <p data-bbox="195 1218 286 1240">Red Dupa</p>	<p data-bbox="565 892 1012 1051">A guide by igniting the fire in him (bhuana alit) and moving him towards unity with Hyang Widhi so that the request to avoid Covid-19 is granted. This is likened to incense whose smoke goes up and merges with the sky.</p>
4	 <p data-bbox="195 1501 322 1522">Ambeng Rice</p>	<p data-bbox="565 1245 1012 1315">The description of the earth (soil) as a place of life and the life of all God's creatures that must be preserved by asking for His blessing.</p>


(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

No	Name of Materials	Symbolic Form Meaning
5		This material is meant the unified determination to respond to the Covid-19 Pandemic by continuing to strive.
6	Nasi gulung/Ball Rice 	This is symbolized the protect that taken from the word tamenung in ancient Javanese and manekung which means to say a prayer.
7	Ayam ingkung 	Every activity during the Covid-19 Pandemic should be carefully planned so that the results are in line with expectations.
8	Telur rebus/Boiled eggs 	Human beings must be able to adapt and share benefit to themselves and their environment. As for the meaning of the vegetables served into one, namely: Toge : growth and creativity Kangkung: humans must adapt to the environment Spinach: this life is cool, calm, and peaceful Long beans: life must always think long in making decisions Red chili: can illuminate himself and others Urap dressing (grated coconut): life and make a living

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

No	Name of Materials	Symbolic Form Meaning
9	 <p>Pisang raja</p>	This symbol is reformed that those who carry out the ritual succeed like the king's human being who is fair and wise.

The event was hosted by Mulyono (Kamituwo Dusun Sodong). The activity began with Buddhist and Islamic greetings. Furthermore, the hamlet elders Rev. Dhammaratna Saimin (93 years old / RT 001 RW 001), Siman (66 years old / RT 002 RW 001) and Junari (64 years old RT 001 RW 00) conveyed the intent and purpose of holding the ritual of rejecting the balance and giving advice (advice). The advice contained the need to maintain harmonization in life, how life should be and how life should be lived, including responding to Covid-19. After the advice from the village elders was finished, it was followed by a prayer led by Suratno (52 years old / RT 001 RW 001). After that, it was continued with a feast (Fig. 2).

**Symbolic Form meaning of Ubo Rampe/Materials** The Ubo rampe used by the people of Kampung Buddha Sodong in the ritual as listed in the Table 1.

## 5 Discussions

The Ubo rampe in the pandemic time *tolak bala* ritual started by the people of Kampung Buddha Sodong has a symbolic meaning in pre-modern Indonesian culture, not just referring to a concept, but something absolute, something transcendent, and something supreme. The reference symbol is not the connotation of ideas (ratio), and human experience (taste), but the presence of supernatural powers. Symbols are signs of absolute/transcendent presence. More than that, the symbol of the ubo rampe above does not only have a horizontal-immanent dimension, but also a transcendent dimension, so it contains both horizontal and vertical meanings. This ritual makes the beliefs feel secure, happy, and safe in passing their life peacefully so that increase their immune in preventing their health from Corona disease [15].

The Ubo rampe in the Covid-19 start-up ritual at Kampung Buddha Sodong Ponorogo consists of seven kinds of flowers, frankincense, incense, rice ambeng, rice golong, ingkung chicken, urab vegetables, boiled eggs, and plantains. The Ubo rampe contains a symbolic meaning in dealing with Covid-19, humans need to harmonize their relationship with the supernatural and with each other (vertical and horizontal relationships). Ubo rampe gives guidance to humans to avoid Covid-19 by getting closer and asking for protection from God. In addition, humans are reminded to be introspective, care for



others, be fair and wise in responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic. These kinds served also in many tribes in Javanese people though the completions are varied. In meaning, all thing is meant much for getting closer to The Almighty and hopefully make them live in peace and secure.

## 6 Conclusions

*Ubo rampe* or ritual materials for Kampung Buddha Sodong's Covid 19 *Tolak Balak* ceremony contains the meaning of human relations with each other, and humans with the supernatural (vertical and horizontal). The seven kinds of flower boreh, frankincense, red incense, rice ambeng, rice golong and chicken ikung show the vertical relationship between humans and supernatural powers that have and will provide protection, peace and prosperity in their lives. Meanwhile, boiled eggs, urab vegetables and plantains contain the meaning of human relations with themselves and with each other. Humans are remembered with this symbol that activities in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic must be prepared carefully, must be able to adapt and benefit the environment, be fair and wise.

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